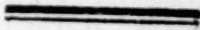


12.

GENERAL UNION

RECOMMENDED TO

REAL CHRISTIANS.



[PRICE ONE SHILLING.]



GENERAL UNION

RECOMMENDED TO

REAL CHRISTIANS,

IN A

SERMON,

PREACHED AT

BEDFORD, OCTOBER 31, 1797.

BY

SAMUEL GREATHEED.

WITH AN

INTRODUCTORY ACCOUNT

OF AN

UNION OF CHRISTIANS OF VARIOUS DENOMINATIONS,

WHICH WAS THEN INSTITUTED

TO PROMOTE THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE GOSPEL;

INCLUDING A PLAN FOR

UNIVERSAL UNION IN THE GENUINE
CHURCH OF CHRIST.

PUBLISHED AT THE REQUEST, AND FOR THE BENEFIT, OF THE UNION OF CHRISTIANS FORMED AT BEDFORD.

"THAT IN THE DISPENSATION OF THE FULNESS OF TIMES, HE MIGHT GATHER TOGETHER IN ONE ALL THINGS IN CHRIST."

PAUL TO THE EPHESIANS.

LONDON:

SOLD BY T. CONDER, BUCKLESBURY; W. BUTTON, PATERNOSTER-ROW; AND T. CHAPMAN, FLEET-STREET.

1798.

GENERAL UNION

AND THE

SEASIDE



INTRODUCTION.

THE public attention is claimed by the following sermon, not for any pretension to merit in it as a composition, but on account of the importance of its subject. The want of harmony and affection among fellow Christians, and still more the prevalence of enmity and persecution, have always been sources of lamentation to the real friends of Christ, and of triumph to his foes. We should imagine, if the history of the Church did not undeceive us, that every attempt to obviate these evils would recommend itself to the consciences of all sincere Christians. The obvious necessity for perseverance in such endeavours, the benevolent spirit which they discover, and the complicated difficulties which they have to encounter, might, we should think, apologize for imperfections in their plan, and failures in their application. If the measures now laid before the public, should, on the contrary, be treated with indifference and contempt, or excite opposition and reproach, the authors of them will have to reflect for their consolation, that greater and wiser men than themselves have met with a similar fate. Should the present efforts be crowned with happier success, they will attribute it, under the blessing of God, whose honour they aim to promote, to the ad-

vantages which have been derived from the experience of past ages, and from the favourable disposition which has lately appeared among various classes of pious people, to unite their exertions for the spread of the Gospel.

The small commencement that has been made, in the county of Bedford and its neighbourhood, by uniting together serious Christians of every denomination within those limits, will, it is hoped, be attended with important spiritual benefit, so far as their union extends. But the assembly before which the following discourse was preached, was doubtless influenced, in requesting that it might be published, by a persuasion that the subject of it merited the attention of Christians in general. The plan which they have adopted seems equally practicable by others, with such trifling alterations as local circumstances may point out. It may be contracted, or expanded, to any degree. It is carefully guarded against a probability of interference with the peculiarities of any party among Christians; and if latent impediments to an universal union among pious people, of any denomination whatever, should be detected, the fundamental principle upon which the union has been formed, requires their immediate abolition. If a party exists in the religious world, so constituted, that its members cannot consistently unite in doing good, with any but those of their own communion, that party is certainly *Anti-Christian*; for the disciples of Christ have but one Master, and are all brethren. But, were the principles of every party among the professors of Christianity to be examined, it would probably be found, that they include nothing incompatible with the union now proposed. The obstinate aversion which has been shewn both here and on the continent, by *some* sects of Christians

against

against every attempt hitherto made for peace and concord, has evidently resulted, not from the principles upon which they were constituted, but from the deficiency of a Christian spirit, and the predominance of a carnal policy in the Members of which they were composed. When the excellent H. W. Ludolf heard of a project for uniting several branches of protestants in one religious form and way of worship, he observed, that "The most effectual way to bring about a union, would be first to unite people to God; for then they would readily be united among themselves. But whilst that dividing spirit of self-love bears so great a sway in our ecclesiastical transactions, we cannot possibly expect any great and lasting effect from an attempt of this nature *."

"True Christianity," says the same writer, "is a resemblance of Christ. Those notions of it are low and mean, which would make it consist in outward forms of worship merely, or in a particular set of opinions. It would not signify much, if all the men in the world were brought to use the same forms and expressions, should they continue slaves to sin, and abide in the kingdom of darkness; but real holiness, sincerely pursued in every particular church, would bring people over to that sweet and heavenly temper, to which jarring and disquiet is a perfect stranger. †"

The spirit of the union lately formed at Bedford, coincides with the sentiments expressed in these quotations. Its end, however inadequate the means may prove, was no other than to reconcile and establish the *purity*, which the sacred scriptures insist upon, as essential to the

* See Dr. Wright's Treatise on being born again. Preface.

† Ditto, Appendix.

genuine Church of Christ; together with that *unity*, which they inculcate, as congenial with its nature, and necessary to its welfare.

Fact was preferred to theory, in laying the foundation of this union. It was not pretended to argue from a man's creed, that he consequently must, or must not, be a real Christian. Our Saviour's rule, "by their fruits ye shall know them," was judged the best and safest. Men can only judge by the appearance, and of this they are bound to form a charitable judgment. But as the same outward actions are often performed upon opposite principles, and as the virtue or religion, consequently the Christianity, of any suitable action must depend upon the motive from which it is performed; it is evidently necessary, in deciding *who* are real Christians, to attend, not merely to the general conduct, but likewise to the principles by which persons profess to be actuated.

Faith, which worketh by love, alone avails any thing in Christianity. Christ is the great object of our faith; and what we believe respecting him is immediately connected with the essential points of our religious character. Whether he is, or is not, the object of our trust, our worship, and our obedience, is a question that cannot be unimportant. Without an agreement in this essential point, it is difficult to conceive how persons can walk together in any of the paths of religion. The various classes of Christians, comprehended within the limits where the union has been formed, are happy to entertain no difference of judgment, as to the sense of Scripture, respecting the person of Christ, or the necessity and efficacy of his atonement for sin. By *grace*, they hope for salvation, through *faith*; which they ascribe not to themselves, but are thankful for to God, as his gift; and as the work of the Holy

Holy Ghost, renewing the spirit of their minds. Their known unanimity in these sentiments, rendered it unnecessary to insist upon them in the following discourse; but it seemed improper to leave the public in uncertainty as to their views of doctrines, which they regard, in common, as essential to salvation. In several matters of subordinate importance, they cannot judge alike; but in these they exercise mutual forbearance, not daring to call *that* profane, which God hath cleansed. There are, in Bedfordshire, and its neighbourhood, pious persons of the Established Church; of the late Mr. Wesley's connection; of the Unitas Fratrum, usually called Moravians; and of several independent Churches, both Pædo-baptists, and of the denomination of Particular Baptists. The latter, which are the most numerous within these limits, includes some churches which admit Pædo-baptists to the Lord's Supper, and others which maintain strict communion. But all these descriptions, consistently with their various views and principles, may unite for purposes that do not infringe upon the sentiments, the forms, or the discipline, of their several societies.

Some among their Ministers were necessarily, or occasionally, associated with those of their own denomination, in distant situations; others met, at stated periods, with their neighbouring brethren, without respect of parties. Some of these conceived the desire for a general Union, and they communicated it through the county, by a short circular letter from Woburn. In consequence of this step, a meeting was held, on the 24th of August, at Ampthill, which had been appointed as a central situation. The notice was found to have been given too short a time, to admit of many Ministers assembling; but among those who met on the occasion, there

appeared an unanimity and a cordiality which rendered the conference highly satisfactory, and afforded a pleasing earnest of their future progress. The author of the sermon having produced a letter, addressed to Ministers of the Gospel of all denominations, it was judiciously proposed to adapt it to the attention of private Christians; and it was resolved, that 500 copies of it, with the requisite alterations, should be printed and distributed among the Ministers, with a brief address, requesting them to recommend the subject to their several congregations. It has been judged necessary to insert this paper in the present statement, to render it more connected and complete.

Reverend Sir,

AT a Meeting held on Thursday the 24th of August, at Ampthill, it was resolved that the following Address and Plan, which were then unanimously agreed to, should be printed; and that several Copies should be sent to all those Ministers, in and near Bedfordshire, whom we had encouragement to regard as Brethren in the Gospel of Christ. We request the favor of you to distribute the inclosed Copies among the Congregation that attend upon your Ministry; and if you think it proper to read the Address from your Pulpit, you will oblige, in doing so,

Your affectionate Brethren

and Servants for Christ's Sake,

*T. P. Bull.
Wm. Coles.
Rich. Davis.
Sam. Greathead.
Tho. Hillyard.
Sam. Hillyard
Jno. Scropton.
Tho. Wake.
Wm. Wakefield.*

Christian

Christian Brethren,

THE Lord has favored *you* above the greater part of Mankind. Many Millions of Souls have never heard of the living and true God. They know him not as their Creator, much less as their Redeemer from Sin and destruction. But if we have received the Truth as it is in Jesus, with spiritual benefit, we have cause still more to admire the distinguishing Mercy of God towards us; while we lament that many hear it, without profit to their Souls. What shall we render to the Lord for all his Benefits? Do we not make it a matter of our most serious concern, to shew forth *his* praise who hath called us from darkness to marvellous light? The less we have been impressed with the peculiar obligations conferred upon us, the more need we have, at present, to pray that the Holy Spirit may excite us to a lively gratitude, and to a zealous improvement of every opportunity for promoting the Glory of God, and the good of immortal Souls.

Those of us, who have been honored with a Call to preach the Gospel, and with success in our ministration of it, are doubtless under the strongest obligation to every good word and work. But to advance the cause of Christ is not the Duty of his Ministers *alone*; nor can they effect much without the cordial assistance of private Christians. All of *you*, who contribute your attendance, your prayers, and your property, toward the encouragement and support of a Gospel Ministry, have an honorable and important share in its happy effects. But there are, probably, few Ministers, who might not labour with greater success, if their Congregations exerted themselves more, to promote and extend their usefulness.

The Command of Christ, to his disciples, was, to preach the Gospel to all Mankind. They had freely received, and it was their duty freely to impart the invaluable Gift. This Command is, still, far from having been fulfilled. It remains in full force; and it calls for our obedience, as opportunity presents itself. How can they, who are without the Gospel, obtain that treasure, but by *our* means, in whose charge it is deposited? They, to whom the Lord has given worldly abundance, if they see fellow creatures perishing for want, are doubtless bound in duty to relieve them. Every bounty, which God intrusts to us, is to be improved for His Service, and for the general Welfare. To be unfaithful to *any* trust which

God reposes in us, must change it from a blessing to a curse. How can we, then, expect the blessing of God upon the Gospel, which he has committed to our charge, if we neglect to impart it to fellow Sinners, who are perishing for lack of knowledge?

It is to be lamented, that any, who have opportunity to attend the stated Ministry of the Gospel, should either neglect to hear it, or should hear unprofitably. Such persons are peculiarly guilty; but we are clear from *their* blood. There are, however, in most parts of the County, people, situated at such distances from any stated preaching of the Gospel, that we cannot expect them, ignorant as they are of its value and necessity, to overcome their hindrances to attend upon it. The inhabitants of towns and villages, so circumstanced, are usually as destitute of true Godliness as Heathens themselves can be. If we use no endeavours to introduce the Gospel to their notice, we have reason to apprehend that they will be taken away in their iniquity. If the degree of their guilt is not so great as that of those who have the Gospel within their reach, and who do not profit by it; it concerns us to consider, whether a share of Guilt does not rest upon us. The prophet was told, that, if he did not warn sinners of their danger, their blood would be required at his hands.

The conduct of most, if not all of us, has (we trust) shewn, that we are not insensible of the truth and importance of these principles. We have not contented ourselves with having the Gospel at our own doors; but, in many instances, have carried it to the doors of others. Happy are those of us, whether Ministers, Congregations, or private Christians, that have no cause to take shame to ourselves, for omitting such a duty and privilege. Yet much, very much, remains to be done in this way. If we have done our utmost *separately*, let us try what more can be accomplished by *uniting* our exertions. Let us make them general, instead of partial; mutual, not unconnected; and stated, where they have been occasional and uncertain.

Such an Union, among real Christians, as is consistent with freedom of private judgment, and fulfilment of the dictates of conscience, is warranted and required by the Word of God. The Church is *one* body, of which our Lord Jesus Christ is the Head. Whether as private Christians, or as distinct Societies, we are all members one of another; and if we neglect the duties, which, as
such,

such, we owe to each other, and to our exalted head ; it must be displeasing to Him, and hurtful to us. The head says not to the feet, " I have no need of you ;" nor should the foot say " because I am not the hand, I am not of the body." The first Christian Churches were united. They corresponded, sympathized, and co-operated together. *We* have too long resembled the scattered bones of Ezekiel's Vision. If, now, we are disposed to draw near, and unite to each other, let us acknowledge it to be of God. Can we, *till* we are united, expect to be clothed with vigour and beauty, and animated by the Spirit of God ! What would be the condition of our Churches, if the members of them were no more united together, than the Churches themselves are to one another, as members of the general body of Christ ? What might we not hope for, as to mutual benefit, and general usefulness, from a spiritual, cordial, and active Union of all real Christians ? Never was there such an age as that in which we live. The Nations are shaken. The Desire of all Nations approaches. " The Spirit and the bride say, Come !" And " let him that heareth say, Come !" He who long since testified these things, saith, " Surely I come quickly. Amen ! Even so, come, Lord Jesus !"

Surely it is time, that the keen edge of Bigotry, which has so long mangled and separated the members of Christ's body, should be taken off for ever. What are the points of difference between real Christians, compared with the greatness of those objects in which we all agree ? The Kingdom of God, and His righteousness, are what *we* would concur to promote ; and we cordially invite real Christians, of every persuasion, to unite with us for this great purpose. We ask you, therefore, to treat your separate interests, as subordinate to the general cause of our Lord ; to lay aside, so far as the occasion requires, the things in which we differ ; and to devote, to the spread of the Gospel at large, such a portion of your care, or labour, your time, or property, as your immediate duties may admit, and your several circumstances demand. We aim at *Union*, not *Uniformity* ; we wish to excite your *zeal*, not to alter your opinions ; we long to promote your love to *all* fellow Christians, not to lessen your attachment to those with whom you are immediately connected. Be ye separate from the World ; resist and oppose Satan ; wield only the Weapons which are spiritual, and mighty through God ; meddle not with political Contentions ; but follow
after

after the things which make for peace, and whereby one may edify another.

In many parts of the Country, fellow Christians have, long since, set us laudable examples of associating together for useful purposes. The disposition has now become so general, that if we neglected the present occasion, we might shortly become the *only* instance of disunion among neighbouring Churches. The partial Associations, in which some of us have been engaged, do not appear to us to supersede that Union we are now recommending. It becomes us to attempt making up for the backwardness which may perhaps justly have been imputed to us, by profiting from, and improving upon, the plans of earlier Associations.

In submitting to you the following plan, we hope it will derive essential improvements from *your* attention and communications. Every work must have a beginning; and *we* have not set our hands to this from any notion of our sufficiency for the Undertaking; but because we are strongly persuaded that the purposed Union is desirable; because we believe it to be a general duty to "provoke to Love and to good Works;" and because we know not how soon we may be in that state, where there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom. Whilst, therefore, a sense of our own frailty will prevent us from censuring any who may disapprove, in the whole, or in part, of the following Plan, we earnestly recommend it to your serious attention; addressing ourselves to *you*, as to persons, whose hearts, we trust, are as sincerely concerned as our own, to advance the great object at which we aim.

The PLAN, which was annexed to this Address, was drawn up in twelve Resolutions, forming the outline which was afterward filled up at Bedford. It was published with the Address, in the Evangelical Magazine for October; and it seems unnecessary to reprint it here. A meeting was thereby appointed to be held at Bedford, on the 26th of September, to consult on the establishment of the proposed Union; and two sermons were proposed to be preached
on

on the occasion. In the mean time, most of the Ministers, to whom copies of the Address had been sent, recommended the subject to the attention of their hearers. When, however, the day arrived, the appointed business, to which numbers were looking forward with ardour, was suspended by an event that could not be foreseen. The highest flood, known to have affected the country for a century past, deterred many, who designed to have attended the Meeting, from leaving the places of their abode. Others, who came from considerable distances, were obliged to return without entering the town of Bedford; which was surrounded, and partly overflowed by the waters, to a considerable depth. A few Ministers, and others, who gained access to the town, met for public worship. In the afternoon, Mr. Hillyard, of Olney in Buckinghamshire, preached (in the large meeting-house, built on the spot where John Bunyan formerly laboured) upon a text evidently suggested by the surrounding scene: "Therefore will not we
" fear, though the earth be removed, and though
" the mountains be carried into the midst of the
" sea; though the waters thereof roar, and be
" troubled, though the mountains shake with
" the swelling thereof." Psalm xlv. 2, 3. In the evening, at the same place, the author of the ensuing discourse addressed his Brethren, upon Matthew xxiv. 46. "Blessed is that servant, whom his Lord when he cometh, shall
" find so doing." And immediately afterward Mr. Dickins, of Keyshoe, in Bedfordshire, closed the services with a sermon upon Philippians ii. 16. "Holding forth the word of life." The flood prevented many of the inhabitants, and some of the Ministers in the town, from either attending the public worship, or meeting together for consultation; but they who had opportunity

tunity to assemble, agreed to postpone the Meeting for establishing the Union, to the last day of the following month. They returned to their habitations, thankful to have been permitted to meet together; established by their interview in the purposes and hopes they had formed, resigned to the Lord's will concerning the event, and earnestly committing to his blessing the cause in which they had engaged for his service.

On the 31st of October, their wish and expectation were, through the goodness of God, accomplished; and the delay, that had occurred, seemed to be useful, rather than detrimental, to this plan. In the forenoon of that day, Mr. Mayle, of Blunham in Bedfordshire, began the public worship with prayer. The following sermon was then preached; and Dr. Gordon, of St. Neot's in Huntingdonshire, concluded with prayer. These services were conducted at the same place of worship as the former had been; and Mr. Samuel Hillyard, Minister of the congregation stately assembling there, gave out psalms and hymns adapted to the occasion. Nearly fifty persons, Ministers and others, chiefly from the surrounding country, dined together; and, with others, assembled in the afternoon in the same place of worship, to consult and decide upon the formation of the Union. Dr. Gordon, who was requested to preside at this conference, introduced it by seeking divine guidance and influence. Having unanimously agreed upon the nature and objects of the proposed Union, it was established by a resolution, that all present, who were Ministers or Members of Religious Societies, wherein evangelical piety was requisite to communion, should declare themselves, and each other, to be members of an UNION OF CHRISTIANS, formed to promote, by their joint exertions, the knowledge of the Gospel. To this

resolution they accordingly subscribed their names ; and all agreed to act in their respective situations, together with those whom they might afterward associate with themselves, to the best of their powers, for the advancement of christian harmony, and spiritual usefulness. It was then proposed to make a commencement of the funds, that would be requisite in extending the knowledge of the Gospel ; and the sum of forty guineas, chiefly in annual subscriptions, was immediately contributed by several of the members, according to their ability and convenience. The Ministers present also agreed to recommend to each of their congregations, to make an annual public collection for the same purpose. The officers judged to be necessary for conducting the business were then chosen, as follows ;

The Rev. WILLIAM BULL, of Newport Pagnel,
PRESIDENT.

SAMUEL GREATHEED, of ditto. VICE
PRESIDENT.

SAMUEL HILLYARD, of Bedford,
SECRETARY.

And Mr. JOHN FOSTER, Merchant, of Biggles-
wade, TREASURER.

Another general meeting was appointed to be held at Bedford, on the last Tuesday in April 1798, the Lord permitting : Mr. Wake, of Leighton Buzzard, and Mr. Bull senior, of Newport Pagnel, were requested to preach on that occasion.

The places, from whence Ministers or Members of Religious Societies, attended at the formation of the Union, were distributed, for the better advancement of the work, into five districts ; viz.

The

The Central, including Bedford, Cardington, Cotton-End, Cranfield, Stevenon.

The North Western,—Newport-Pagnel, Olney, Yardley, Wollaston.

The South Western,—Amptill, Ridgemount, Woburn, Leighton, Thorn.

The South Eastern,—Blunham, Biggleswade, Hitchin.

The North Eastern,—Keyshoe, Kimbolton, St. Neot's, Gamlingay.

The thanks of the Union having been obligingly voted for the sermon that had been preached, and the publication of it requested; it was afterward resolved,

That this Union now declare its readiness to correspond, associate, and co-operate, so far as it may appear practicable and mutually serviceable, with all Ministers of the Gospel, religious Societies, and pious individuals, wheresoever situated: and

That Sir Egerton Leigh, who favoured this Meeting with his attendance from Warwickshire, be authorized and requested to communicate the measures that have been, and that are proposed to be taken, to those Ministers in his neighbourhood, whom he judges likely to concur in a plan of Christian Union*.

In the preceding narrative, those measures which have a personal or local reference, have been thrown together; it having been thought eligible to abstract from them the substance of those Resolutions, passed at the same time, which were of general concern, in order to afford a more distinct and comprehensive idea of the

* In consequence of this measure, more than twenty Ministers of various denominations assembled at Little Harborough, in Warwickshire, on the 21st of November, and passed several Resolutions, tending to the establishment of an union of serious Christians, on a similar plan to that adopted at Bedford.
plan

plan. In this arrangement, some use will likewise be made of regulations which have been adopted at the subordinate meetings, held subsequent to the general meeting, in several of the districts. Before this is submitted to the Christian reader's serious attention, it appears necessary to close the narrative of the proceedings.

The general meeting having been conducted with a candour, harmony, and zeal, suited to the design for which it was called; and a foundation being laid for an union of Christians, which, upon however small a scale, yet seemed adapted to connect purity and liberality in the greatest practicable degree; the assembly separated in peace and thankfulness. A crowded congregation met in the evening, at the Meeting House where Mr. Burkit administers, who read the Hymns; Mr. Bull, sen. engaged in prayer; Mr. Dickins, of Keyshoe, preached from Hebrews xiii. 15, 16; "By him, therefore, let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually; that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to his name: but to do good, and to communicate, forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased." Mr. Davis, of Thorn, concluded with prayer; and, after it had been recommended to the united congregations to join, at their respective places of worship, on the first Monday evening in every month, to offer up intercession for the blessing of the Holy Spirit upon this plan, and upon every measure used for the spread of the Gospel, at home and abroad, the audience was dismissed; many acknowledging that God had been with them of a truth in the services of the day.

The following analysis of the plan of union is presented to the public, as an arrangement and explanation of the principles adopted, and

the measures meant to be pursued in promoting its objects. It includes some particulars that could not, for want of time, be taken into consideration at the general meeting; and which are therefore to be regarded as proposed, rather than as determined. On the other hand, the plan is yet far from having reached the maturity which it may possibly acquire by length of experience, and extent of counsels. Every hint for this purpose, especially such as tend to remove obstacles to an unlimited union of real Christians, will meet with serious attention from the persons appointed to conduct the concerns of the union, who hope, that, if preserved to another general meeting, they may be enabled to propose means for its effectual improvement.

PLAN OF A GENERAL UNION AMONG REAL CHRISTIANS.

I. NATURE of the UNION.

It is to consist of persons who agree in their views of Christian faith and practice, so far as they judge these to be essential to salvation. It is of a distinct nature from all churches, secessions, or associated bodies of Christians, generally known to exist; and it is meant to interfere with none of the peculiar circumstances of sentiment, form, or discipline, by which they are divided. No separation from former religious connections, no renunciation of principle, nor accommodation of language, is requisite for admission to this union. Sufficient evidence to form a reasonable and charitable judgment of the sincerity of a Christian profession, is alone to be demanded from them who are desirous to unite.

2. OBJECTS.

Its objects are not of a civil, but of a religious kind; not of a formal, but of a spiritual nature. Its primary design is to restore the universal Church of Christ to some measure of its primitive harmony and unity; and thereby to remedy the positive and obvious evils, which have been produced by discord among Christians. Its secondary aim is to spread more effectually the knowledge of the Gospel among mankind in general, where they have hitherto remained destitute or negligent of its advantages. This is expected to be essentially promoted by an union of counsels and operations; and by the enlarged views, and affections, and the increased exertions, which such an union is adapted to produce. The immediate object of the union, *already* formed, is to promote the religious instruction of persons in their own neighbourhood, by preaching, exhorting, reading, conversation, and prayer; but in proportion to the enlargement of the limits and powers of the union, it is desirable, that *every* object of *general* usefulness, that is of a purely religious nature, and tending to the everlasting salvation of fellow sinners, should be embraced in its progress. To spread the Gospel in the dark and depraved parts of the British Colonies, and in the *Heathen* world, with every spiritual and evangelical undertaking, for which there is evident occasion, and which does not relate to the internal concerns of Churches, or cannot be accomplished by their separate strength, are proper subjects for the attention of an union of Christians.

3. MEMBERS.

All persons of the description given in the first article, who desire admission to this union, are
C considered

considered as willing to promote its objects, according to their ability and opportunity.

All who have been (according to their *own* views of the proper mode and subject) baptized into the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; and who likewise partake of the Lord's Supper, with Churches, or religious societies, in which evidence of evangelical piety is *requisite* to communion, shall, upon their request, be considered as members of this union.

They who are in communion with Churches, or religious societies, wherein such evidence is *not required*, but which are under the direction of Ministers of approved faith and conduct, shall be admitted to union upon a suitable testimony from the Minister on whom they attend.

Persons who are *not* joined in communion with *any* Church or religious society, but whose character, as sincere Christians, is known and approved, by others who are members of the union, may, upon *their* testimony, be admitted.

No subscription to any confession of faith, no engagement to peculiar modes of conduct, nor any pecuniary contribution, is to be demanded in order to their admission.

Those persons only who have been admitted as members of the union, are entitled to vote respecting its measures, or can be appointed to conduct and carry them into effect.

4. MEETINGS.

These indispensable means of union and of co-operation, are to be regulated, as to their frequency, and other circumstances, by the calls which arise from the progress of the work. They are to be conducted in such manner as to avoid unnecessary trouble and expence. They are to be accessible to all persons who chuse to attend at them. All the members of the union shall

shall be present at them, as often as they can without neglect of their duty in other relations.

A *general* Meeting shall be held once, or oftener, in each year; to be attended from as great distances as can conveniently be traversed by the more active Members of the union; which will probably be from 20 to 30 miles, around the place of meeting. The Members thus assembled, shall elect, by ballot if convenient, a *President*; and, if *he* requests that assistance, a *Vice-president*; to preserve order, and expedite business at the Meeting, and to superintend the concerns of the union, within the limits of the country from whence the Members present have assembled. In like manner, a *Secretary* shall be chosen, to record the proceedings of the Meeting, and to conduct the correspondence of the union, under the direction of the President. Likewise a *Treasurer*, to take charge of the funds necessary to be raised; to make disbursements, upon applications certified by the President; and to keep regular accounts, which shall be audited at the next general Meeting. On *that* occasion, the office of each of these persons terminates; but any of them are re-eligible.

For the more expeditious and effectual discharge of business, the extent of country, to which the general Meeting relates, shall be distributed into several districts; in each of which subordinate Meetings shall be held, by Members of the Union residing in the district, so often as they may have occasion to make reports, or to hold consultations. For the purpose of conducting these Meetings in such a manner as may be most conducive to the general advantage, it seems desirable that the officers of the Union should be present at them, as frequently as may be in their power; and that *one* of them at least, should be at each of the district Meetings. Their

travelling expences, out of the district in which they reside, are, therefore, to be charged to the general account. The Meetings may either be held, always at one convenient place, toward the centre of each district; or, alternately, at the several places in the district, where Members of the Union reside. The latter mode, where practicable, is attended with several advantages. In each district, one, or more of the members, may be chosen, to act as Secretary, and to receive contributions, and transmit them to the treasurer of the Union. At these Meetings, all measures necessary to be taken in the district, shall be decided by ballot or vote; the resolutions recorded; Members of the Union admitted, and registered; and the whole be communicated to the Secretary of the Union; and through him to the President; who shall report, at the next general Meeting, whatsoever concerns the common good.

If the limits of the Union extend sufficiently, *other general Meetings* may be held, at central situations; and the business be conducted, within their respective limits, in a similar mode, so far as it may be applicable to local circumstances. The Presidents, or other agents for each branch of the Union, should correspond upon all subjects of general concern; and Members may be deputed from one general Meeting, to attend at *another*; in order to receive and impart advice; to testify their mutual respect and affection; to cement their union with each other, and with all who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity; and to co-operate in all measures that tend to advance HIS kingdom beyond their own respective borders.

5. MEASURES.

The measures to be used by Members of this Union, in promoting its objects, must, in general, be such as are worthy of the Gospel; not doing evil that good may come. They shall be pursued in conformity with, and under the protection of, the laws of the land. No Member shall be called upon to act in any mode incompatible with the discipline of the religious community to which he belongs. No place shall be set apart for public worship, by this Union, in the neighbourhood of any evangelical congregation, or of the residence of any pious and zealous Minister of the Gospel, without his, or their consent. Those parts of the Lord's day shall be preferred, as seasons for preaching, when there is no other public worship whatever in the neighbourhood.

Reports shall be made, at the meetings in the districts, of all neighbouring towns, villages, and hamlets, in which those truths, the knowledge of which we apprehend to be important to the salvation of sinners, are *not* preached. Enquiry shall be made for persons willing to have their houses registered for preaching, or to admit meetings for prayer and reading: and houses or rooms hired, if possible, where these resources fail.

Ministers belonging to the Union will avail themselves of these advantages, as far as their time and health admit. If *one* has more calls to preach than he can fulfil, he will receive assistance from some neighbouring minister, who has fewer. They will, occasionally, exchange their village lectures, to excite greater attention. Places that are populous, and centrically situated, may be supplied by several Ministers, in a regular course.

Where there are sufficient calls for employment, and means of support, a suitable Minister, to *itinerate* constantly, shall be sought for, and engaged.

Where these means are defective, it is recommended to congregations, as a laudable sacrifice, to spare their Minister, occasionally, or constantly, one part of the sabbath, to preach in unenlightened places. Lectures shall be preached on other evenings in the week, where they are likely to be well attended.

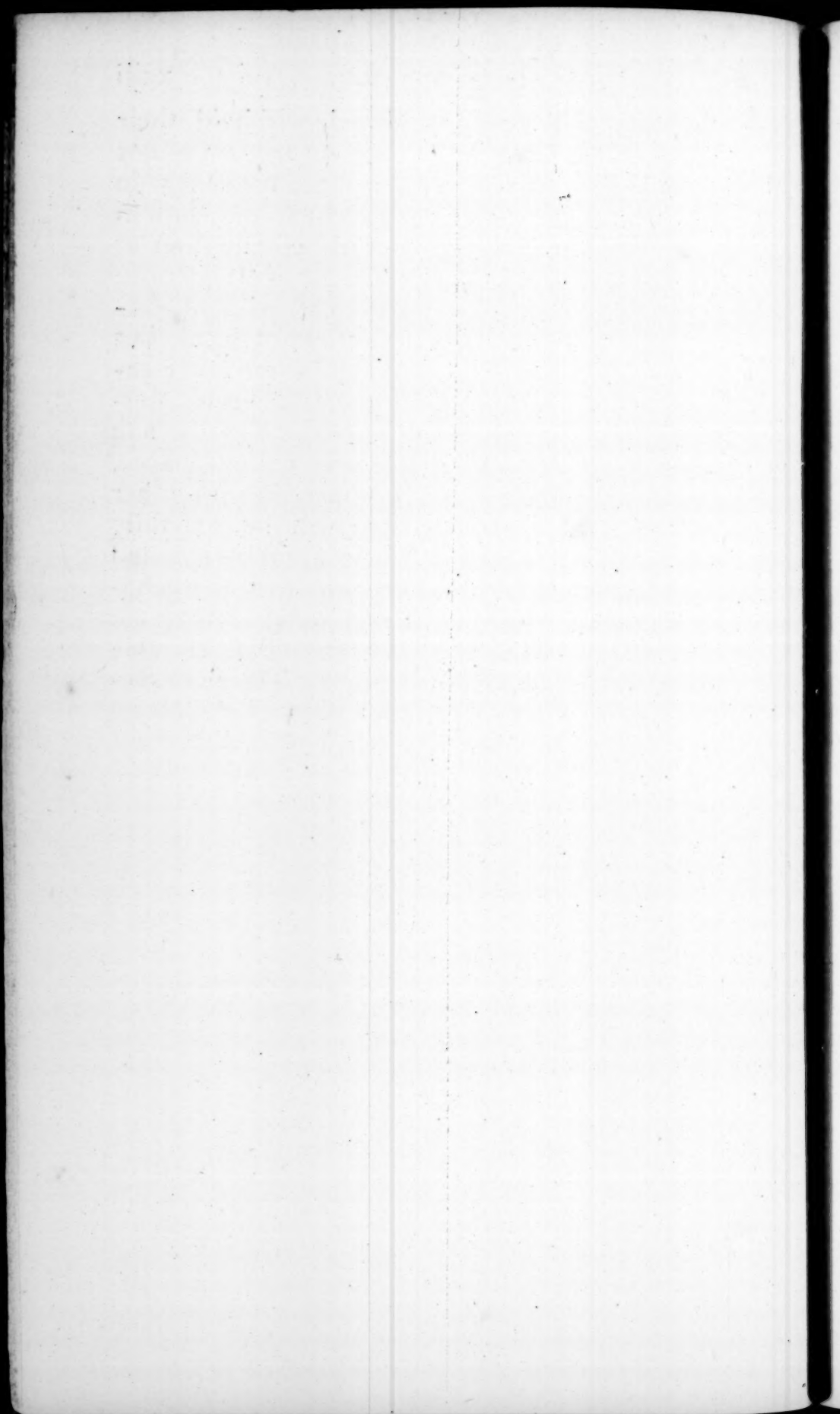
Members of the Union, who are *not* Ministers, but whose capacity is approved by the Minister on whom they statedly attend, shall be requested, when necessary, to conduct prayer Meetings, read sermons, exhort, or preach, in the villages; to attend Sunday schools; and to accompany Ministers, into neighbouring places, where the Gospel has not usually been preached. Members, who can supply little or no pecuniary help to the Union, may, in some or other of these ways, become essentially useful to its success.

6. FUNDS.

It is evident, that, although much good may, at a small expence, be done, within certain limits, upon this plan, yet its usefulness may be carried to the utmost extent that its *funds* can be made to support. It is recommended to all congregations, to which Members of this Union belong, to make, if possible, one *public collection* every year, for its assistance in promoting the general good. The affluent and liberal, who are *members* of the Union, will afford it the most suitable and regular support, by *annual subscriptions*. Others, who wish well to the spread of the Gospel and the good of fellow-creatures, but who distrust their own claim to the privileges of christ-

christians, will not, it is hoped, withhold their contributions from the Union, on account of not becoming its Members; any more than they do from the congregations with which they join in public worship, though not in communion at the Lord's supper.

As the Union of christians, without distinction of parties, is a subject not of local, but of *universal* concern, and may be rendered capable of unlimited usefulness; it is humbly suggested to *all* pious and generous persons, whose distance of situation, or peculiar circumstances, may hinder them from co-operating in other respects, that their donations will be gratefully received, as tokens of their approbation and good-will, and faithfully employed for the general cause of their Lord and ours, if they are conveyed to Mr. JOHN FOSTER, Biggleswade; GEORGE LIVIUS, Esq; Bedford; The Rev. SAMUEL GREATHEED, Newport-Pagnel; or JOSEPH REYNER, Esq; Duck's-foot-lane, London.



SERMON.

PSALM CXXXiii. I.

BEHOLD, HOW GOOD, AND HOW PLEASANT IT IS,
FOR BRETHREN TO DWELL TOGETHER IN UNITY.]

THE short psalm, which begins with this exclamation, seems to have been written upon occasion of some solemn assembly of the Israelites. They were enjoined, by the law of Moses, to gather together from all parts of the land of Canaan, three times in each year, at the feasts which were held at Jerusalem. It has been conjectured,* not unreasonably, that the comparisons, which are used in the following verses, regarded the appearance of the encampments, which the multitude of the assembled worshippers, too numerous to be lodged within the city, had extended over the neighbouring hills, and along the narrow vallies by which they were intersected. A mind, like the psalmist's, rich in imagery, might naturally suggest a resemblance between the innumerable tents, which spangled the surrounding country, and the dew drops, which he had seen diffused over the extensive borders of Mount Hermon, glistening with the beams of the rising sun. Turning his

* Vide Michaelis in loco.

view to the city and the tabernacle, and perhaps beholding the high-priest entering upon the solemnities of the day, he compares the eminence, where the sanctuary was situated, to the head of Aaron, upon which the sacred oil was poured, so copiously, that it trickled down upon his garments *, as the encampments spread from the suburbs through the adjacent fields. His reflections, formed into a brief, but beautiful ode, are introduced by the words of the text, " Behold, how good, and how pleasant it is, " for brethren to dwell together in unity !"

The psalms are often quoted in the New Testament, as having a prophetical signification. Many pious and learned writers have concurred in the opinion, that this character is applicable to the whole collection which we have of these sacred poems. I see no reason to deny, that the expressions before us have a regard to those assemblies, which, under the Gospel, worship the Father, not in sanctified places, but in spirit and in truth. Through the mosaic veil, which was rent when Jesus expired, we discover our great High-priest, anointed, above his fellows, with the oil of gladness, that it might descend upon his members: and these are elsewhere compared, by the psalmist, to the dew at the birth of day †. In every age, and in all circumstances, it is good, and pleasant, for believers in God's word to dwell together in the unity of the Spirit, in which their fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.

In applying this subject to our improvement of the present opportunity, it seems proper to consider,

* מִמְּדֻתָּי signifies, not the skirts, but the hole in the robe of the ephod, by which it was slipped over the head. See Exod. xxxix. 23.

† Psalm cx. 3.

1. The character of the persons spoken of, as implied by the title given to them; *Brethren*:

2. The conduct recommended to persons of this description; *dwelling together in unity*: and,

3. The high approbation expressed of such a conduct; *How good, and how pleasant it is!*

And while we attempt to meditate on these things, may the God of peace and love fill us with suitable dispositions, and guide us into his will respecting the occasion and design of this meeting!

1. Upon the *character* of persons must depend the propriety of their dwelling together, and even the possibility of their living in unity. The *title*, here used, expresses a mutually endearing *relation*, which in its most extensive application, connects the whole human race. The words of Malachi, "Have we not all one Father? Hath not one God created us?" have, however, a more emphatical signification, when applied peculiarly to the Israelites. Of the family of Jacob, and distinguished from other nations by the knowledge and worship of the only living and true God, they were *brethren* in a higher sense of the term. Under the Gospel dispensation, the bonds of natural kindred are no longer connected with those of religious privileges, as they were under the law. But the dissolution of carnal ties made way for the extension and confirmation of those of a spiritual nature. Our Lord fore-warned his disciples among the Jews, that he had "other sheep," which were not of the same fold with them, "and that them also he must bring; and they," said he, "shall hear my voice, and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd." They who before, as heathens, had been far off, were made nigh by the blood of Christ, who became the peace-maker for all, breaking down the separating

separating wall of jewish ordinances, that he might unite in one the two divisions of mankind, which had been at enmity with each other, because unreconciled to God.

In treating of the bonds, by which believers in Christ are united as brethren, their *mutual relation*, and their *general resemblance*, afford matter of reflection adapted to promote their attachment to each other.

The affinity of brethren toward each other, is grounded in their *relation to a common parent*. So, the union of the children of God depends upon their union to HIM. They are bound to each other by every tie that unites men together, as created and preserved by the same universal parent; and every peculiar benefit, by which they are distinguished from others, becomes a new, and more powerful bond. Whatever, as believers in Christ, they, *in common*, hope for, or experience, obliges them to mutual love, as brethren, beyond what they owe to others. That "God so loved the world as to send his
" only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth
" in him should not perish but have everlasting
" life," is a truth, which indeed should prompt us to universal love toward fellow sinners. But whilst the judgment of pious people differs, in other respects, concerning the *ransom* which our blessed Saviour paid for sinners, and the *redemption* which is accomplished by it; all agree, that real believers in Christ are rescued by his sacrifice from the condemnation of God's law, and are made the habitations of God, by his spirit dwelling in them. Therefore although not a human creature lives, of whom any of us would dare to say, Christ died *not* for that man: and although every fellow sinner has a more tender claim to our regard from this consideration; yet they who believe in Christ have an undoubted,

doubted, an universal, a pre-eminent claim to our love, as brethren, because we are all bound to regard them as redeemed from sin and the world by the manifestation of the Son of God, who loved *them* and gave himself for *them*. It is true, they love *him*, and we love him; and must therefore love each other also: but our love to Christ is not worthy of the name. "Herein is love; not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another." And the scriptures set forth the amazing love of Christ to his people, not only as a constraining *motive* to excite them to love each other, but even as an *example* of the extent, to which fraternal love should, when necessary, be carried: "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren."

There cannot, one would think, be a stronger bond of union than the interest that we believe each other to have in the dying love of Jesus. It is, indeed, the source of all motives to mutual affection among christians; but the stream, which flows from this opened fountain, enlarges as it proceeds. How strong an incitement is it for us to love as brethren, when we consider, that "to as many as have received Christ, he gave the inestimable privilege of becoming the sons of God; even to them that believe in his name; who are born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." We are brethren in the important sense of being *born of God*, born of the spirit from above, children of God by faith in Christ Jesus, whose spirit we have, if we are his. Compared with our filial relation to God, no earthly relation is to be spoken of. We are

to " call no man our father on earth, for one is
 " our Father who is in heaven." Yet it is by
 the love that we discover toward our brethren in
 the faith, that we are to prove, and exercise, the
 love we profess to God as our Father. " No
 " man hath seen God at any time. If we love
 " one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love
 " is perfected in us. If any man say, I love
 " God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar:
 " for he that loveth not his brother, whom he
 " hath seen, how can he love God, whom he
 " hath not seen? And this commandment have
 " we from him, that he who loveth God love
 " his brother also."

The future effects of the redeeming love of
 Christ, added to its present fruits, heighten the
 importance of our relation as brethren, and
 strengthen the obligations we are under to mutual
 love. Of them, to whose minds the Spirit
 beareth witness that they are the children of
 God, it is said, " and if children, then *heirs*;
 " heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ."
 How delightful is the prospect, how glorious
 the hope set before us, for ourselves and for one
 another! Pious people are agreed that God
 " will not leave them nor forsake them;" and
 that " none can pluck them out of the hand of
 " Christ." What then have we to make our
 general concern, but that God may " put his
 " fear into our hearts, that we may not depart
 " from him?" " Give diligence to make your
 " calling and election sure;" " rejoice in the
 " hope of the glory of God;" and " see that ye
 " love one another out of a pure heart fervently,"
 as those " who are begotten again unto an in-
 " heritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and
 " that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for
 " you, who are kept by the power of God
 " through

“ through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time.”

We see how suitable it is that faith and hope should work by love. May we not confidently assert, that, so far as they are in exercise, they must, and will produce this effect? But it is not merely from things, which, though they are eternal, are unseen, that I have to inculcate upon you a disposition proper for brethren in Christ. In earthly families there is not only a relation to the common parent, an interest in his love, and a title to provision and inheritance, but there is usually a visible *resemblance* among brethren, arising from the resemblance they bear to their parent, and from the condition in which they are placed by their dependance on him. So, in the family which on earth is named after Christ, there is a resemblance in the disposition, the conduct, and experience; suitable to their character as brethren; and adapted, if properly considered, to cement their mutual love.

All, whom God “ calls and justifies,” are to be “ conformed to the image of his Son.” However various their natural dispositions, and however opposite they have been to the mind of Christ, they now “ repent, and are converted.” The “ heart of stone” is taken away, and a “ heart of flesh” is given to them. They become sensible of their depravity and guilt, their pollution, and their helplessness. They are convinced of their condemnation by God’s law, and are in earnest to escape the wrath to come. Christ becomes precious to them, in proportion as they perceive the nature and sufficiency of his salvation. His Word becomes their meditation and their comfort: his Spirit their guide and their help. “ Being justified by faith, they have “ peace with God through Jesus Christ.” In short, “ beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord,

“ Lord, they are changed into the same
 “ image, from glory to glory, even as by the
 “ Spirit of the Lord.” Such is the picture
 which the Scriptures, our experience, and our
 observation, concur to give us of a child of God.
 Do you not, my brethren, delight to contemplate
 it? You ought to do so; for it is the image of
 God himself, impressed on the human mind.
 And while you trace the resemblance of “ our
 “ Father, who is in heaven,” if you “ love him
 “ who begat,” you will surely also “ love them
 “ who are begotten of him.”

The conduct and conversation of believers
 afford but an imperfect discovery of what they
 think and feel of spiritual objects; yet by the
 fruit you may discern the nature of the tree,
 whatever impediments there may be to its abun-
 dant fruitfulness. The words and actions of con-
 verted persons are greatly varied by their natural
 tempers, and former habits of life; by the cus-
 toms of the people with whom they usually
 assort; by their temporal conditions, and unequal
 opportunities of general knowledge: but when
 the fear and love of God prevail, there will be
 an important difference in the conduct from
 what it was whilst without God, and from what
 it is in those who remain devoted to the world;
 and there will be an important resemblance in
 the conduct of all who are children of God by
 faith in Christ. They “ have put off the old
 “ man with his deeds, and have put on the new
 “ man which is renewed in knowledge, in righte-
 “ ousness, and true holiness, after the image of
 “ him who created him.” It is their desire,
 their purpose, and endeavor, to be “ imitators
 “ of God,” as affectionate children imitate their
 parents; and Christ “ has left them an example
 “ that they might walk in his steps.” It is
 therefore to be expected, that their general con-
 duct

duct must have a strong resemblance. The great variety of the situations in which I have been placed, at different periods of my life, enables me, my brethren, to bear a peculiar testimony to the certainty of the fact. In remote countries I have met with persons, whose forms, whose language, whose very sentiments, in many respects, (some of which I had previously thought to be of the utmost importance) differed exceedingly from my own; yet, upon a close and attentive view of their lives, I was convinced, that they were no other than the children of God, and heirs of the kingdom of heaven. " We took sweet counsel " together, and walked unto the house of God " in company;" nor had I occasion, afterward, to " hide myself" from them. Several of them have finished their course with joy, and have joined the Church of the first-born. Excuse me, my brethren, if I am earnest in pressing sincere followers of Christ, however different in forms and inferior views, to know each other better, and love each other more. I should probably, at this hour, have felt as much repugnance to such an Union as any of you can do, had not God, by peculiar dispensations of his providence taught me not to call that common, which HE hath cleansed.

It is an affecting consideration to them who are brethren in Christ, that, amidst all the diversity of their forms and opinions, there is a general and striking resemblance, both in their inward, and their outward *experience*. " The heart know-
" eth its own bitterness, and a stranger inter-
" meddleth not with its joy;" but the people of Christ are of one heart; they all know the plague of their own heart; their spiritual distresses, their fears, their hopes, their consolations, are drawn from the same sources of which their brethren have tasted, though some have drunk deeper
D than

than others. This may likewise be affirmed of their *outward* experience in most respects. " If any man will live godly in Christ Jesus, he must endure persecution." " We must suffer with Christ before we reign with him." The world, which hated and despised him, will treat all who resemble him in disposition and conduct, with the same enmity and reproach. Nay, it appears that he suffered the temptations of Satan, and the contradiction of sinners, for the very purpose of supporting and encouraging us, amidst these trials. " In all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren; and in that he himself hath suffered, being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted." We have not, therefore, " a highpriest, who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but one who was in all points tempted like as we are:" and shall we allow ourselves to be so unlike our Lord, and so unnatural toward our brethren, as not to sympathize with them? " No temptation hath assailed us, that is not common to humanity." The afflictions endured by us, are " accomplished also in our brethren, throughout the world." Let us therefore " weep with them who weep, and rejoice with them who rejoice." Let the feelings which are due to all mankind, be exercised, in the most eminent degree, toward our brethren in Christ; with whom we are but " one body, and one spirit, even as we are called in one hope of our calling; for there is one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God, and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in us all."

All sincere believers in Jesus Christ ought, then, to regard each other as brethren, in their relation to God and to each other; redeemed by the precious blood of Christ, renewed by the Holy

Holy Spirit, and made meet for an everlasting inheritance with the saints. They also resemble each other, in their prevailing dispositions and conduct; and in what they inwardly and outwardly experience. These are bonds of Union, not between the members of one society or of one denomination of Christians alone, but between all who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, without any distinction arising from the circumstances wherein they differ. How ample is the foundation, how exalted the building of the genuine church of Christ! To what shall we liken it? *Not*, surely, to so inferior a fabrick, as could be erected upon all the sentiments that were ever laid for the foundation of schism, although it were composed of every variety in form and discipline, by which churches of human construction have been diversified. The things which have divided Christians from one another, could never have seemed great, had not those which united them been lost sight of. How wonderful is it, that the three-fold cord of Faith, and Hope, and Love, should ever have been broken! May we be re-united by it, so that
 “neither death, nor life, principalities nor
 “powers, things present nor to come, may be
 “able to separate us, again, from that love of
 “God,” and of our brethren, “which is in
 “Christ Jesus our Lord.”

What I have now to recommend, as a duty and a privilege, to those of you, who, in so many important views, should regard each other as Brethren, is

2. To dwell together in Unity.

By these expressions, our translators of the Bible have endeavored to reach the force of the original terms, which have by some others *

* See Ainsworth's Pentateuch, &c. and Purver's Bible.

been more literally rendered, "to dwell even together." According to that application of the phrase which seems best suited to its primary sense, it could not mean, that the persons spoken of should dwell together through the whole course of their lives ; but that they should assemble, and abide together, as much as they had opportunity, in the worship and service of Jehovah. The Israelites dwelt together, in the land of Canaan, at the time when this psalm appears to have been written, in greater unity than any other nation is known to have done ; and even than they themselves did, either before, or afterward. Their tribes, however, inhabited separate allotments of the land ; and it was only upon occasion of the solemn feasts, held at Jerusalem, that they statedly mingled together. It was as worshippers of the one true God, Jehovah, that they were united, as spoken of in the text. And the Union, which I have to recommend to you, my brethren, is one which does not respect your state in civil society, but merely your religious fellowship. It is as *brethren* in the senses already pointed out, that I exhort you to dwell together in Unity. The intimate, and eternal ties, by which you are connected as believers in Christ, are the sources of many and great duties, that you owe one to another, and that cannot be fulfilled, except, so far as you have opportunity, you *dwell together*.

I have intimated my belief that the psalmist, by the spirit of prophecy, looked forward to that unity of Brethren, which should be established under the dispensation of the Gospel. Other holy men of God spake also, as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, of this subject. So Zechariah foretold, that "Jehovah," though at that time worshipped only by the Jews, "should
" be

“ be king over all the earth : in that day,” said the prophet, “ shall there be one Jehovah, and his name one.” Chap. xiv. 9. And, long after the decease of the royal psalmist, the Lord spake thus by the prophet Ezekiel ; “ I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David ;” chap. xxxiv. 2. and again ; “ David, my servant shall be king over them ; and they shall all have *one shepherd.*” Chap. xxxvii. 24. The name of David, signifies a *relation*, or one who is *beloved* ; and the character of a shepherd, which is so frequently ascribed to Christ, points us to him, as the subject of these prophecies. The Gospel, which he came to establish, was, at once, a consummation of the preceding manifestations of God’s will, and an institution completely adapted to the nature and tendency of the objects to which it relates. The views in which all the people of God are brethren, were not fully illustrated till the Gospel was promulgated ; and it might reasonably be expected, that the unity, which such an endearing relation and resemblance required, would *then* be firmly established. But the expressions, which our Lord used, when interceding for his people, before he was offered up, transcend all the ideas, which we can form, by our experience, or conjecture, of that Union, which he designed to subsist among them who are called by his name. “ Holy Father,” said he, “ keep, through thine own name, those whom thou hast given me ; that they may be one, as we are. Neither pray I for these alone, but for them, also, which shall believe on me, through their word : that they all may be one, as thou Father, art in me, and I in thee ; that they also may be one in us ; *that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.* And the glory which thou gavest me,

“ I have given them : *that they may be one, even as we are one.*”

Alas, how is this glory departed from the church of Christ ! Where is this ONENESS to be found ? Shall we content ourselves with the Unity that subsists, here and there, among a handful of persons, worshipping under one roof ? Shall we be satisfied that this, or that sect of christians, is closely compacted together ; whilst it is but the more widely detached from the rest of Christ’s people ? How are men of the world to believe in the divine Mission of our Saviour ? they believe it *not* : they blaspheme the name of Jesus : and they themselves assign, as a reason for their unbelief, that christians (ah, how unworthy of the name !) are divided, and opposed among themselves. They who are Brethren, in spiritual and eternal ties, dwell not together in Unity !!

In the *beginning* it was not so. Whilst their Lord’s precepts sounded in their ears, and vibrated in their hearts, his followers could not but dwell together in unity. He had new modelled the command of loving their neighbours as themselves. It was to be performed under new sanctions,—with a new spirit, and in a new manner. “ A new commandment,” said he, “ I give unto you, that ye love one another : *as I have loved you*, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are *my disciples*, if ye love one another.” This charge he gave to them in immediate connection with the prediction, that in a short time he should be removed from them. Accordingly, when he had ascended from Mount Oliver, the apostles returned to Jerusalem, and “ continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women,” who had followed Jesus, and with his kindred. The Jew-
ish

ish religion seems to have been either formal or solitary. Even when they assembled at the temple, each prayed apart. Christianity is at once spiritual and social. Brethren in Christ! remember that you are embracing a Gospel privilege, when you continue with one accord in prayer. Dwell *thus* together in Unity, without respect of parties.

When the disciples had greatly *multiplied*, they forsook not the assembling themselves together. After the effusion of the Holy Spirit, when three thousand had been added to their number, "they still continued stedfastly in the apostles doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers." "All that believed *remained together*, and had all things common; they who had possessions and goods selling them, and imparting them to all, as every man had need. And continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people." They constantly increased; and yet, afterward, we are told, that "the multitude of them that believed, were of one heart and one soul: neither said any of them, that aught of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had all things common."

Persecution could not deter the first disciples of Jesus from dwelling together in unity, whilst it was possible for them thus to aim at fulfilling the commandment of their Lord. Their conduct was too remarkable to escape the notice of the ecclesiastical powers among the Jews. The high priest, and his adherents of the sadducean sect, were filled with indignation; they seized, imprisoned, and scourged the apostles. But

these “ rejoiced that they were counted worthy
 “ to suffer shame for the name of Christ; and
 “ daily in the temple, and in every house they
 “ ceased not to teach and to preach Jesus
 “ Christ.” Blessed be God, that we have no
 present prospect of suffering similar persecution
 for dwelling together in religious Unity; but if
 we had, and avoided it through the apprehension,
 or even the experience of its consequences,
 we should not be followers of the primitive
 believers as, they followed Christ.

At length, however, the allwise Judge of the
 earth permitted the malice and rage of mortals
 to render it *impracticable* for the multitude of
 the disciples, literally, to dwell together. They
 were forced to disperse into various neighbouring
 countries. But the wrath of man was made
 productive of praise to God, and the superfluity
 of it HE restrained. The disciples who had fled
 to *Antioch*, the capital city of Syria, “ preached
 “ there the Lord Jesus, and the hand of the
 “ Lord was with them: and a great number
 “ believed, and turned to the Lord.” But did
 this congregation of believers, and the others
 who had weathered the storm of persecution at
 Jerusalem, consider themselves as disunited,
 because they were three hundred miles apart?
 by no means: at that distance they maintained
 a christian unity, by which they supplied each
 others wants, both of a spiritual and of a tem-
 poral kind. At Antioch, the infant church was
 in need of an experienced teacher. The apos-
 tles, and others at Jerusalem, sent to them an
 eminent person of their brotherhood, named
 Barnabas; who, “ when he came to Antioch,
 “ beheld with joy” the evidences they gave
 that “ the grace of God” was among them, and
 “ exhorted them all to cleave with purpose of
 “ heart to the Lord.” And in just recompense,
 when

when a general famine was likely to prevail, "the disciples at Antioch, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren which dwelt in Judea." It was at Antioch, that the disciples were first called CHRISTIANS. Brethren, it is my hearts desire and prayer, not merely that our various party titles may give place to this animating and endearing name; but that, with it, we may be restored to the spirit and practice of the disciples at Antioch and Jerusalem! Barnabas, and Saul, who was then recently converted from being a furious persecutor, were honoured with the commission of presenting to the christians in Judea this seasonable contribution; and after their return to Antioch, they were set apart, by the church assembling there, for a still more important and glorious work. This was, to bear the Gospel to the *heathen*, who had not as yet received the glad tidings of salvation. The labour, and the danger of the undertaking, were cheerfully encountered by these christian heroes: the charges of their extensive journey must, apparently, have been borne by the common funds. They met with persecution from men, but received support and success from the Lord. They gathered *churches* in the principal towns of the neighbouring countries; revisited them; appointed the best qualified of their converts to minister to the rest; and having returned to Antioch, "they gathered the church together, and rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith to the heathen." The union of the new formed churches, with those from whence the Gospel had been sent to them, and with each other, was afterward cemented by visits made to them separately by Paul and Barnabas: and the former extended his missionary labours

to

to Europe, as well as to other parts of Asia, through which he had passed. All these places he revisited, after having again spent some time at Antioch: and the earnestness with which he inculcated every where the unity of affection that should be maintained by all christians, and the mutual correspondence and assistance that they owed one to another, is testified by the *letters* which he wrote to several of these religious societies, and to some of the ministers who laboured among them in the Gospel. He evidently regarded the various churches of Christ, not as distinct bodies, but as members of the same body, between which there should be an unremitting communication of sympathy and succour. How numerous and affectionate are the salutations that he presents, including always the ministers and believers who were with him, in his expressions of good will toward the people to whom he writes. He provokes one church to love and good works, by the example of another: and while he firmly maintains the freedom of Gentiles, who believed in Christ, from the yoke of Jewish ceremonies, he pleads, notwithstanding, in the most forcible manner, with the European churches, in behalf of the christians at Jerusalem, when the latter stood in need of their pecuniary assistance.

It was at *Jerusalem* that most of the Apostles usually resided at the commencement of the spread of the Gospel; and to them, and to other Ministers with them, was referred for decision, the only difference in judgment and practice which seemed, at that time, likely to divide believers one from another. It was natural for the *Jews* to be tenacious of formalities, to which they, and their ancestors, had been universally accustomed; and after they became disciples of Christ, they appear to have persevered in the ceremonies

ceremonies of the Mosaic law. But when multitudes, who had lived in *Heathenism*, were converted to Christianity by the ministration of Paul and Barnabas, these enlightened servants of Christ required from them no conformity to the Levitical institutions, but merely that faith in Jesus Christ, which worketh by love to God and man. This gave offence to some of the Jewish believers, who were not satisfied with being themselves allowed to keep up their ceremonial customs, nor with the same practice in their brethren who were converted from Judaism to Christianity. They insisted, likewise, that the converts from Heathenism should conform to their ritual; and they carried their bigotry to such a length, as even to assert, that, "except the Gentile believers were circumcised, after the manner of Moses, they could not be saved." The Gentiles were not likely to form the same judgment of these matters, any more than the Jews were to admit them as Christian brethren, without conformity to their views. The churches at Antioch and Jerusalem must have been disunited from each other, or from those newly formed in other towns of Asia, if the contending parties could not have been reconciled. But the unity of Christians was not, at that period, so slight a bond, as to be broken by their differences in opinion about forms. Peter and James, though themselves ministers of the circumcision, supported Barnabas and Paul in their arguments for the continuance of the Gentile converts in the liberty wherewith Christ had made them free: and the Church at Jerusalem unanimously concurred in sending an affectionate letter to their Gentile brethren, in which they only requested them to abstain from such food as must be peculiarly disgusting to their Jewish brethren. The Church at Antioch rejoiced in the removal of this obstacle to the
general

general unity of believers, and communicated these instructions to the rest of the Christian Churches. The letters, which were written by the other Apostles, afford testimonies of their concern to preserve intercourse and unity among believers dispersed in different countries. Those of Peter seem to me to be addressed to converts from Heathenism*, whom he aimed to confirm in the truths they had received from the mouth of his beloved brother Paul. Those of James and Jude apply to Jewish believers: the latter having been probably written at the same time, and from the same place, with the second epistle of Peter; and both these sent to people, of those different descriptions, in the same Christian society†. The larger Epistle of John is not limited to persons of either class, nor of any place of residence; and it breathes a spirit of fervent and unbounded love. His shorter letters, written apparently later than the rest, were probably sent from Ephesus, where he is said to have closed his life, to persons in Greece; by the hands of Missionaries, who were passing that way, in order to spread the Gospel still more extensively among the Heathen‡.

This scriptural account of the manner in which the first disciples of our Lord fulfilled his command, by maintaining union with each other, does not, I trust, appear to you, my brethren, unseasonable or tedious. If we know these things, happy are we if we do them. I should not think the remainder of our time, whilst together, ill spent, if I was able to give you the continuation of such a narrative, from

* 1 Peter ii. 10.

† Upon this supposition it seems least difficult to account for the sameness of ideas and language in 2 Peter and Jude.

‡ 3 John v. 8. Gaius probably dwelt at Corinth. Rom. xvi. 1, 23.

the historical information that we possess, concerning the ages which succeeded that of the Apostles. I am sorry that this is not in my power; not through want of examination, but through want of satisfaction, on the subject. Soon the fine gold became dim. Good men, who had been companions of the Apostles, laboured, indeed, to preserve a cordial and effectual union among the Churches of Christ; as is evident from some of the epistles written by them which are still extant. Synods of Christian Ministers were also frequently convened in various places; to consult upon what might promote the welfare of the whole Church, or of some neighbouring congregations. But the leaven, which at length pervaded the entire mass, began very early to discover its effects. Ministers pretended to a power over their congregations, which the Apostles themselves had not claimed. And the next step they took, was to contend, *who* should be greatest among them? How soon had they forgotten the admonition of our Lord; "one is your master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren!" Before two hundred years from the birth of Christ were completed, whilst yet under the galling yoke of a heathen Emperor, the bishop of Rome attempted to oblige the churches in Asia to conform to a custom then established among those in Europe, by commemorating the resurrection of Christ at one particular season of the year. Thus by attempting to establish *uniformity* among Christians, their unity was subverted. The spirit of Christianity was superseded by the letter, the power by the form, and the commandments of Christ by the inventions of men. Oppression provoked resistance, and resistance produced *schism*. The churches became corrupt; and good men, instead of labouring to reform them, renounced

renounced communion with them. The bad, left by themselves, grew worse. Now and then, some short revivals of godliness took place, especially after severe persecutions: but these, like the transient reformatations of the Jews before their captivity, could not avail against the gradual progress of corruption. Christians, only such in name, after having separated, persecuted one another, even to the death. God scourged them by the inroads of barbarous heathens; whom, when they became embroiled by mutual discord, they had neglected to evangelize. Whilst Christians had maintained a spiritual and effectual union, the Gospel triumphed over all opposition from the most powerful empire ever known. But when they no longer kept the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace, instead of waging offensive war against Satan, they were trampled down in the east and in the west, in the north and in the south, by nations before unheard of. Miserable was the substitution made for spiritual conquests, when *some* barbarians assumed the name of Christians, without even an outward change of their manners; and others were driven into the water by armed troops, in the stead of Christian Baptism. The only effectual means of producing *uniformity*, was found to be a suppression of the Scriptures; and the Bishop of Rome dared to prohibit the word of God from being read by the people at large. Abuses, beyond description, naturally ensued. The horrid monster *Popery* grew up to maturity, fattening itself upon the blood of the few witnesses, which God, as if by miracle, raised up from the grave in which Christianity lay buried. At length, amidst circumstances, which must, if any thing could, have sufficiently demonstrated the mischiefs of discord among Christians, God had mercy on the Church, and on the world. One hundred

hundred years of chaotic darkness, and infernal cruelty, had succeeded the detestable council of *Constance*, when the labours of the Protestant reformers commenced. The light of the Gospel re-appeared, after its total eclipse. But it was not to be expected that it would immediately resume its original splendour. Unhappily, the ardent spirit of the Reformers too easily re-kindled the spirit of discord. Small differences of judgment disunited them who agreed in doctrines of the first magnitude. They split into sects, and Rome rejoiced: they persecuted one another, and she triumphed. In vain, from age to age, a few pacific and liberal men, laboured to unite the jarring parties. The beginning of strife is like the letting out of waters. The evil grew with continuance. No seed is so fruitful as that of dissention. Sects have multiplied without number. The slightest difference of form, or sentiment, has been sufficient to produce separation, and opposition, between Christian brethren. The ground, which at first was gained from Popery, has in consequence been partly lost; and vital godliness has become a subject of wonder and reproach among Protestants of almost every name. Attempts to spread the Gospel, at home and abroad, are branded with the stigma of fanaticism. Even the most devout and orthodox, concur with profligates and infidels, in pouring contempt upon missionary efforts; whilst they recede, as if with abhorrence, from the respectful and affectionate approach of brethren, who court their union, though they dare not conform to their example. It was a scene like this, which, in the last century, excited the grief and pity of Queen Mary. Among other admirable traits of character, it is recorded, that "next to open impiety, the
 " want of heat and life in those who pretended
 " to

“ to religion, and the deadness and disunion
 “ of Protestants in general, very sensibly affected
 “ her. She often said, with feeling and cutting
 “ regret, “ Can such dry bones live? ”*

Do not your hearts, my brethren, sympathize with that of this excellent princess, at so deplorable a review? Your presence, upon this occasion, authorizes me to believe that you are not insensible to the best interests of your fellow creatures, nor unaware how essentially they have been injured by the prevalence of party spirit. Surely we long, with one heart, that Christian Union may be restored to its primitive strength and beauty, and that it may be rendered boundless and everlasting. It becomes us to cherish a wish that tends so directly to the glory of God, and to the good of men. It becomes us to form it into prayer; because the prophecies, and the promises of God's word, encourage us to hope for its accomplishment. Our power to promote this, is limited indeed, and feeble; yet it is incumbent on us all to do our utmost toward it. Union, as Christians, concerns every believer in Christ; and the defection is so general, that a new beginning must somewhere be attempted. When an army flees before the enemy, and no part of it tries to rally, all must be lost: but a handful of troops has sometimes turned the tide of victory, by a seasonable and resolute stand. There is some room to hope that *this* may be an accepted time for our prayers and exertions. It is with growing pleasure, that I have observed, and taken part in, the assemblages of several parties among Christians in England, which have associated within a few years past, for particular purposes. By these means, the widows of our deceased fathers in the ministry have been

* Gibbon's Mem. of eminently pious Women. I. 159.
 relieved

relieved from want; an extensive circulation of religious information has been established; and the Gospel has been preached to Heathens and to Jews. The institution of the *Missionary Society* is, especially, remarkable, for the exertions, and the favourable prospects, with which it has been attended. But it has been justly observed, by an able advocate for Missions*, that the very existence of Missionary Societies, betrays the defects of all the constituted Churches of Christ. The whole genuine Church of Christ ought to be engaged, in dispensing to others, the advantages, which the Lord has been pleased to confer upon them, with that express design and charge. This, and every object of general usefulness, requires a communion of all real Christians; whilst every instance of benefit, derived from partial associations, adds both to our obligation and our encouragement, to attempt the formation of an Union, inclusive of *all*, without exception, who are brethren in the faith and hope of the Gospel.

Let us recommend such an union, so far as our connections and our influence extend. Especially, let us do this by our example. Let us dwell together in unity, as the first Christians did. Let us consider one another, to provoke to love and to good works. Look around upon your neighbours, with attention and with candour. Wherever the fruits of Faith appear, you are bound to believe that the root of the matter is in them; and to love, and serve them, for the sake of our common Lord and Saviour. Cultivate their society in religious engagements. Appoint meetings together for prayer; with a view, not to the prosperity of your separate parties,

* The Rev. Greville Ewing, in his *Defence of Missions*.
Page 35, 36.

in opposition one to another ; but to the prevalence of godliness, zeal, and mutual affection, in *all*. Consult how far you can act in concert, for the good of perishing sinners around you. Perhaps what you now do, in village preaching, clashes with each other's measures, and excites mutual jealousy instead of good will : or at best, you have not assisted, nor even accommodated each other, so as to advance the Lord's work in the most effectual manner. Remedy evils that exist ; guard against those which are to be apprehended ; embrace opportunities and advantages, for usefulness, which have been long neglected. Enlarge, as much as you can, your sphere of acquaintance and union, with those of all denominations, who are really your brethren in Christ. Have stated conferences, for these ends, at different neighbouring places, as often as convenient : and let all, who are not incapable of travelling ten or twenty miles, once in the year, meet together at a suitable place, to join in public worship, to learn the progress of the Lord's work by each other's means, and to decide upon measures which relate to the general welfare and usefulness. Let the money, that any of you are able to devote to the cause of Christ, be put into a common stock ; that there may be an equality, the abundance of one supplying the deficiency of another. You are not required to do as the Church at Jerusalem did ; to sell what you have, and give up all your property for the common use. Their peculiar circumstances, at that time, rendered it both practicable and necessary : in ours, it is neither. We even find, that it was not practised among the Christian Churches which were planted elsewhere by the Apostles. But it is plain, that they acted upon the same *principle*, which moved the Christians in Judea to part with all. They reckoned what they
had

had to be not their own, but the Lord's; and they used it in such a manner, as appeared, on the whole, to be most for his glory. Collections for the assistance of them who were spreading the Gospel, and for the relief of them who had suffered on its account, appear to have been general, in the Churches of Asia and Greece. The Apostle Paul, whilst he was extremely careful not to become burdensome to any for his own subsistence, was most earnest and laborious in exciting Christians to acts of extensive liberality. Some of the Churches, especially those of Macedonia, and above all that of Philippi, evidenced the most laudable alacrity in this good work *. " Amidst deep poverty the riches of their liberality abounded;" and consequently, " in a great trial of affliction their joy abounded likewise." Paul records it to their honour; and stirs up the less forward zeal of others, by their example. To the Churches of Galatia, and to that of Corinth, he recommended, that, upon each Lord's day, every one should lay by him in store, as God had prospered him through the week †. If every Christian *now* followed the same rule, there would be no deficiency of funds for spreading the Gospel at home or abroad. Itinerants, and Missionaries, might be liberally equipped; stated Ministers comfortably supported; their widows provided for; young men instructed for the service of Christ; children educated in the nurture of the Lord; places hired, or built, for public worship; and decaying congregations strengthened. These benevolent and needful objects would not *then* depend upon the ebullitions of a party spirit, nor the precarious continuance of charitable associations. The members of Christ's body, if brought to an

* 2 Cor. viii. 1. Phil. iv. 15.

† 1 Cor. xvi. 1, 2.

universal sympathy, and co-operation with each other, under the influence of their glorious head, would need no external help. Till that longed-for period arrives, it is a signal mercy that some of Christ's people associate, though in distinct parties, for several of these purposes: but what a shame is it for the much greater number, who stand idle, whilst a few are enduring the heat of the day! Let *every one* of us, individually, do what he can for the common good: and in those congregations, where the Minister and community are of one heart, in promoting Christian union and exertion, let one public collection be devoted by each, to the cause of Christ at large, without regard to their own separate advantage. That such a general measure would, at the same time, tend to the prosperity of every congregation, hardly admits of a doubt; nor can I think, that individuals would become impoverished, by cheerfully devoting, to the reasonable service of God, a proportion of what he has liberally bestowed upon them. "The silver and the gold are his." That he can take away, by any means he pleases, and to any amount, what he has intrusted to us, is sufficiently evident in the present aspect of public affairs. It is not easy to see how any part of it can be secured, but by lending it to the Lord. The whole property of the believers at Jerusalem was thus put in a state of safety; and we have seen; that, when it was exhausted by war or famine, the Lord repaid them, by the cheerful contributions of their European brethren, who had received the Gospel by their means. When dangers threaten from every quarter, where shall we find protection, but in the Church of Christ? This he hath built upon "a rock, against which the gates of Hell shall never prevail."

I have

I have suggested means by which we may unite, as Christians, to such an extent as includes your respective places of abode. But let us not confine our ideas to an horizon so contracted. Let us not content ourselves with a silent example. Let us make known to distant brethren, the concern we feel for the universal Union of the Church of Christ; and the measures we are taking toward its restoration among ourselves. What is there in our motives, that is not equally proper to every believer in Jesus Christ? What is there in our conduct, that is not practicable by millions? Many, within my knowledge, variously denominated, and remotely situated, are longing for such an union. Thousands and myriads may in secret be sighing and praying for its accomplishment. It may be the Lord's sovereign pleasure that we should, this day, lay the foundation stone of an immeasurable building. It is the glory of God to bring to pass the greatest ends by the feeblest instruments. A gallant vessel, freighted with zealous servants of Christ, has conveyed the Gospel to the ends of the earth, by the exertions of a society, which originated, but three years since, with half a dozen persons. But there is no need to search for precedents, when we all know, that the Christian Religion itself was founded by means of a few poor fishermen. An union of Christians, as such, is grounded upon the nature of Christianity; upon the authority of Jesus; upon his atoning sacrifice, and renewing Spirit; upon the example of his Apostles, and of the primitive Churches; upon the promises, and the prophecies of his word. It must take place on earth; it shall endure throughout time; it will be perfected in everlasting glory. If our present attempt avails not to bring forward this glorious event, it will not be frustrated by the smallness

of our beginnings, but by the slackness of our future proceedings. God forbid, that we should do his work negligently! The success, we may confidently commit to him. Let us then, as Brethren, dearly beloved in the Lord, dwell together henceforth in unity!

If motives need to be added, for the confirmation of our purpose, let us derive them,

3. From the high commendation, which the psalmist expresses of such a conduct; "Behold, how good, and how pleasant it is!"

Brethren, we know that "the ways of wisdom are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace." Never did we fulfill any command of Christ, never engage in any practice congenial to the Gospel, and afterward had reason for regret. We have, therefore, solid ground to expect, that a point of conduct, sanctioned with such authority as the object before us is, will be found highly beneficial, and satisfactory, in the practice. Christian union is the path of duty: it must therefore be the path of comfort, safety, and final success. Indeed, it comes recommended to us by the very nature of man. We are formed for society. Needful, and delightful, as seasonable retirement is to the spiritual mind, it was not good, even for man when sinless, to dwell alone. None of us is ignorant, or insensible, of the advantages to be derived from social and friendly intercourse. Several of us have been accustomed to associate for the sake of each other's conversation: and this we have often found to be good and pleasant; even without a fixed object in view, and without the opportunities, which we may now expect, of turning our social meetings to important and extensive uses. We shall gladly sanctify our communications, to the advancement of the glory of Christ, and the salvation
of

of immortal souls. And those of our brethren, whose impediments to meet could not be surmounted, merely for the sake of rational and spiritual conversation, will not, I trust, be deterred, by common hindrances, from assembling with us; when such motives, as have been stated, call us to general union; and such purposes, as have been intimated, are to be carried into effect. In order, however, that our minds may be more deeply impressed with the subject; and be better prepared for improving our future meetings; let us, before we close this discourse, consider, more distinctly, some reasons, for which it may justly be said, "how good, and "how pleasant it is, for brethren to dwell together in unity!"

The first view, in which I shall endeavour to shew that it will be good and pleasant for you to unite together, relates immediately to your *own benefit and comfort*. It has been remarked that "true self-love, and social, are the same." If this be certain, it is at least equally so, that there is a false self-love, which is opposite both to the love of God, and to the love of fellow creatures. It is in this sense, that the apostle Paul predicted, "men would be lovers of their "ownelves," and spoke of it as a mark of perilous times. Perilous indeed! what mutual confidence, what personal safety could there be, among men, who, uninfluenced and unrestrained by the love of God or of their neighbour, would only seek to aggrandize themselves? Yet such is the universal bent of human nature. Its effects are too visible, even among professors of christianity. Not to speak of its general predominance in temporal dealings, it has too common and general an influence upon religious conduct. What is all party zeal, but selfishness disguised? What is it, that makes us earnest for the ad-

vantage of the congregation to which we belong,
 and indifferent about all others, but self? Are
 we unwilling to plead guilty in this matter?
 Remember, that, in the apostolic age, it was
 complained, not of Jews, nor of heathens, but
 of christians, and even of ministers; that "all
 " sought their own, not the things of Christ."
 Let us not lean to our own understanding, when
 the word of God gives us so much reason to dis-
 trust ourselves. This is very necessary to be
 called to mind on the present occasion. All union
 with those who differ from us, requires some
 sacrifice from self. Yet I doubt not, that a
 general union of christians will prove essentially
 useful to the best interests of them who engage
 in it with alacrity and fidelity. Our immortal
 part claims our chief concern; and its prospe-
 rity in the ways of Christ must constitute our
 happiness. Who can doubt, that the more we
 exert ourselves for the Lord's service, the better
 our souls are likely to fare? Who, that has fre-
 quently conversed with experienced believers,
 can deny, that it is good, and pleasant, for
 them "who fear the Lord, to speak often one
 " with another?" Have not our hearts burned
 within us, when we have heard others tell what
 the Lord has done for their souls? When we
 have been languid, and sinking into lukewarm-
 ness about the things of God; have we not
 found, that "as iron sharpeneth iron, so doth the
 " countenance of a man his friend?" When you
 have detected the evils of your own hearts, and
 compared your conduct or experience with
 what you wished it to have been, you were ready
 to conclude, that your "heart was not right
 " with God, and that you had no part nor lot"
 in his salvation. But upon disclosing your fears,
 or hearing the avowals of persons whom you
 highly esteemed as christians, you have seen,
 that

that "as in water face answereth to face, so is
 "the heart of man." What you have found
 profitable, and delightful, within the narrow
 compass of your own religious community, I
 exhort you to cultivate more extensively. Say,
 as the psalmist did; "come unto me, *all* ye that
 "fear God!" You may find, among them who
 differ from you in forms, and unessential
 opinions, some, whose general views, and usual
 feelings, are more congenial to your own, than
 theirs with whom you have usually conversed.
 There is, perhaps, hardly any party of christ-
 tians, that has not a superiority, in some
 instance, above most other denominations. By
 general union, you may select what is best in all:
 and by distinguishing those principles, in which
 all truly pious men agree, you will better judge
 wherein the essence of religion consists. By these
 means, your minds will be enlightened, your
 hearts enlarged, and your best affections drawn
 into exercise. In a variety of ways, such an in-
 tercourse will tend to assist your judgment upon
 a question, of all things most important to your
 comfort and strength;—"am I renewed in the
 "spirit of my mind?" Nothing can be a plainer
 test for our adoption, than that which the
 apostle John makes use of; "we know, that we
 "have passed from death to life because we love
 "the brethren; he that loveth not his brother
 "abideth in death." It is easier to judge,
 whether we love our brethren, whom we have
 seen, than the Lord, who is invisible. But if
 we have only associated with those christians,
 who statedly worship with us; or, at most, only
 with others, who adhere precisely to the forms
 and opinions that we prefer; there may be room
 for a reasonable doubt, whether our affection for
 them is not founded merely upon the points in
 which we agree together, and differ from other
 followers

followers of Christ. If you say ; “ no, I love
 “ all who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincer-
 “ ity ; for I think of them with respect, and
 “ pray for their prosperity ; though I do not
 “ associate with them : ” I reply, your own
 heart may deceive you ; and it probably does, in
 some measure, upon this subject. “ If a bro-
 “ ther or a sister be naked, and destitute of
 “ daily food, and one of you say unto them,
 “ depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled :
 “ notwithstanding ye give them not those things
 “ which are needful to the body ; what doth it
 “ profit ? ” So, if you dwell not in unity with
 your brethren ; if you do not, as you have op-
 portunity, do especial good to the household of
 God ; how dwelleth the love of the brethren
 in you ? But if you associate with such as are
 united to you, not by ties of nature, interest,
 or custom ; nor by conformity in the outward,
 or incidental parts of religion ; but merely by
 what is essential to real godliness : then you may
 judge, whether you love all who love Christ :
 and you may demonstrate, to your own, and
 others satisfaction, that your love to them is
 founded on their resemblance to Christ ; and not
 merely upon that which they bear to yourselves.
 The love of the brethren partakes in its nature,
 both of love to God, and love to man ; and the
 possession, or the want of it, determines our
 character. If *this* languishes ; every thing, of
 a truly religious nature, declines with it. There
 are too many evidences of this fact, in churches
 that are absorbed in seeking their own ease and
 interest. Like fading embers, there seems to be
 no way of preserving them from perfect dead-
 ness, but by collecting them into one mass.
 Those of you, who are least likely to take an
 active part in promoting general union among
 christians, are, of all people, the most in need
 of

of it. Oh come ; taste, and see, how good, and how pleasant it is, for brethren to dwell together in unity !

Let us next consider brotherly union, with respect to the means it affords us of *doing good to our fellow christians*. The benefit, which you hereby obtain from others, will be reciprocal. The variety, which prevails through the religious, as well as through the natural world, admits, and requires, an interchange of good offices. " There are diversities of gifts from " the same spirit, and they are given to every " man to profit withal. As the same body has " various members, so is " the church, which is the body of " Christ. If the whole body " were an eye, where were the hearing ? If an " ear, where were the smelling ? If all were " one member, where were the body ? But now " are they many members, but one body." That which is true of the mutual benefit afforded by different parts of the same body, is applicable to the help which one individual is capable of affording to another. A German * author well illustrates the advantages of society, by the fable of a blind man, who met one that was lame : the one wanted a guide, the other a supporter : by mutual agreement, the blind man carried him that was lame ; whilst the latter directed him that was blind. His reflection follows ;

" Fatigue not Heav'n with needless cries ;
 " The powers, which God to thee denies,
 " And gives to others, common grown,
 " Become, by mutual aid, thine own."

Seldom is it, that creatures, so imperfect as we are, possess any one faculty in a remarkable measure, without being as remarkably deficient

* Gellert.

in some other. But by christian union each reaps the advantage of what God hath dispensed to all. As the bodily strength of one may execute what another has planned ; so the zeal, or the prudence of men's tempers ; the learning, or the penetration of their minds ; the experience of age, and the vivacity of youth ; the wealth of the great, and the industry of the poor ; may be turned to the best purposes, by acting in concert, for their mutual edification, and usefulness, in the service of Christ. As among animals, one needs the spur, and another the curb ; one is capable of leading the team ; another able to bear the shafts ; and a third, that is unfit for both these situations, will draw his share of the load, when placed between them : so every talent, however great or small, becomes useful, by finding its proper station in society. But how far is this from having been the case in the church of Christ ! How many talents have been useless, or even mischievous, for want of needful stimulation, or direction ! In our small communities of believers, if there is one zealous and active member, he often finds his usefulness impeded, for want of any to second, or advise his measures : and an able minister has sometimes to lament, that no one in his congregation is qualified or disposed for activity. How needful, then, is mutual intercourse, for our general welfare ! The diversity of our modes of government, and discipline, may also become generally advantageous. It is plain, that, in the first age of christianity, there were both *stated* and *itinerant* ministers of Christ. It is also easy to perceive, that they ought both to be continued, till the Gospel, in its purity and power, shall universally prevail. They exist at this day : but how ? Not in concert and union, as in the days of the apostles. No ; they are
utterly

utterly unconnected; and too commonly regard one another with jealousy or contempt. My brethren, these things ought not so to be. Whilst there are heathens, blessed be God that Missionaries can be found! Yet this office was, till very lately, looked upon as only fit for persons whose services were unworthy the acceptance of their countrymen. Whilst there are unenlightened spots in Britain, blessed be God that Itinerants are raised up! Yet what name has been more despised than that of Methodism, the characteristic feature of which is itinerancy? Whilst there are stated congregations, blessed be God that there are pastors and teachers! Yet I have known the contempt, that has been thrown upon Methodists, retaliated by their improper estimation of stated Ministers. The difference of manner, which is proper, and necessary, in these different occupations, has been censured by each class, because it varied from their own. I should be glad to say, that such prejudices had only prevailed among the more weak and ignorant of either class. But it is weakness, at the best, to censure people whom we do not know. Would to God, not only that stated Ministers of various denominations, but that the different classes of itinerants also, may all be constrained by the love of Christ, to know each other more, to love each other better, and to join heart and hand together in the service of our common Lord!

But it has been objected, that people of such various sentiments are likely to come together for the worse, and not for the better. Some are supposed, by others, to maintain such errors, that they cannot coalesce, without contention, or unfaithfulness. This must, indeed, be the only alternative, if we pretended to unite with persons who differed from us in sentiments which we esteem essential to salvation. But these, in

which we are agreed, are evidently of far superior importance to all in which we differ: and will it not be more for our edification, to spend our time together in conferring, rather of the *most*, than of the *least important* subjects? Would it be acting unfaithfully to a dying man, with whom your time must of course be short, if you confined your conversation with him, wholly to things which you apprehend to be necessary to his eternal salvation? Would it not, on the contrary, be acting unfaithfully to your Lord, if you spent the time in debating on modes of worship, or of discipline; or on the distinguishing sentiments of Christian Sects? The cases are not similar in every respect; but they are in this; the time we can spend in conference is short and precious: we have a grand business to transact together, and it would be neglected by attending to inferior objects. These circumstances, whilst they obviate the charge of unfaithfulness, remove, likewise, the probability of contention. Permit me to say, that experience enables me to speak confidently on this subject. I wish we may ever collect into union, persons of sentiments equally various, as those which are professed by directors of the Missionary Society. I do not assert that their consultations have always been free from contention; but I have never known an instance, in which it was excited by any of their differences in religious sentiment. Subjects of greater magnitude have usually engrossed their attention. In order to unite in promoting what we all think to be most important, it is not necessary that we should regard articles of inferior consequence, as if they were wholly indifferent, or uncertain. A modest sense of our own liability to err, and a due respect for the understanding and integrity of our brethren, will doubtless be essential to our mutual

tual peace and comfort. But the influence which I trust our conferences will have, in cherishing such dispositions as these, is not among the least considerable of the advantages attending union among brethren. What can we expect to be more profitable to us all, than to live in the habitual exercise of brotherly love? "If there be, therefore, any consolation in Christ; if any comfort of love; if any fellowship of the spirit; if any bowels and mercies; fulfil ye my joy; that ye be like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife, or vain glory; but, in lowliness of mind, let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others." We have nothing, I am fully persuaded, to fear, but the intrusion of unchristian tempers. Let us never be unmindful of our danger from this quarter. Much circumspection, self-constraint, and forbearance, will be found necessary, even for brethren in Christ to dwell together in unity: but how forcible are the motives, which are suggested by the nature and design of our union, to excite us to the practice of these Christian virtues! "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil-speaking, be, therefore, put away from you; with all malice: and be ye kind one to another; tender hearted, forgiving one another; *even as God, for Christ's sake, hath forgiven you.*" Let but these apostolic exhortations be remembered, and practised by us; and the mutual benefit, to be experienced from our conferences, will constrain us to say, "Behold how good, and how pleasant it is, for brethren to dwell together in unity!"

Another view in which it is of importance, especially in the present state of the world, for
Christians

Christians to unite together, is that of mutual and general *preservation* from impending evils. A common cause can only be supported by the union of them who are concerned in it. "Every kingdom, divided against itself, is brought to desolation: and a house divided against itself, falleth." Our Lord, by the manner in which he applied this observation, intimated that *Satan's* kingdom is not divided. Devils are not cast out through Beelzebub. Much less is it through CHRIST, that Christians have cast out one another; although this has too often been done under pretence of *his* authority, and to the gross abuse and dishonour of *his* name. My brethren, consider with awe, what must be the natural consequence, if Satan's kingdom is united, and that of our Lord divided! It is by sowing discord among Christians, that our subtle enemy has prevailed against them. They who promote divisions are his emissaries. "I beseech you, brethren," said Paul, "mark them who cause divisions and offences, contrary to the doctrine ye have learned; and avoid them. For they who are such, serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly." Surely, such language demands our very serious consideration. Are we, or have we ever been, guilty of exciting division among real believers? Have we, needlessly, separated from Fellow-Christians? Are we *now* discouraging any attempt, however feeble and imperfect it may be, to re-unite all who love Christ?—It is true, there is room to fear that such efforts may fail: but let us take heed that *we* do not, by any language or conduct of ours, render them abortive. In the present corrupt state of the Christian Church, it seems "impossible but that offences will come: but woe to him through whom they come!" Would it not be better for us, to unite together

as Christians, even if we incurred the enmity of the whole world on the account, than to expose ourselves to a censure so severely expressed by the pen of an Apostle, and to a woe, so awfully denounced by the lips of Christ himself?

But if we attentively regard the world around us, we may perceive some leading features of the times, which, instead of deterring us from Union, should induce us to unite without delay. Can we be unaffected by the rapid spread of *Infidelity*? Is it a time for them who know that the Gospel is from God, to flight, and shun each other, for small differences; when the common enemy is striking at the very root of Christianity? Is it a proper season to contend about forms and names; when revelation, immortality, and even the existence of God, are scouted, as superstition and imposture? The *mode* of attack is as formidable as its object. We have not, now, to oppose a few speculative pretenders to philosophy. Infidelity has assumed a popular address. It makes its appeal to the common feelings of mankind; debased by ignorance, and oppressed by want. No longer concealed from general notice by the flimsy veil of scepticism, unbelief now displays its unbashful forehead, and, in open day, accosts all who pass by. No more, as formerly, secluded in the recesses of literary profligates, nor limited to the precincts of ambitious courts, infidelity now, like death, bursts open the cottage door, as well as the palace gate*. It spreads in the lower ranks, and the more ignorant and immoral of our hearers, have now learned to deride the inspiration of the Scriptures, and to stigmatize the Gospel as priestcraft. Is *this* an hour for the

* Pallida Mors æquo pulsat pede pauperum tabernas
Regumque turres.

Horace.

wife to slumber, or for them who yet hold *any thing* sacred, to weaken their forces, by dividing them? No; let all who trust in Christ, as God our Saviour, flock to the standard of the cross, and form an impenetrable phalanx round it. If we *must* separate, and contend together, let it not be when all are equally in danger from an implacable and triumphant enemy. Let the experience of so many ages, and so many nations, teach us the necessity of uniting, if we mean to preserve even the name and appearance of Christianity upon the earth. Where are now the Churches of Asia and of Greece? Where, shortly, will be that of Rome? Let us not rejoice over fallen superstition, without trembling for Religion, against which the blow was evidently aimed. It is not long since, on the neighbouring continent, *all* worship of God was prohibited, and all Ministers of religion whatsoever were imprisoned. The Sabbath still remains abolished; and coercive measures to substitute a *tenth* day of rest, instead of that divinely appointed, have very lately been decreed. Do not mistake me so greatly, as to be *disheartened* by these remarks. More power is with *us*, than with all the enemies of Christ. God is for us, and who shall be against us? Only, let all who love the Lord, regard themselves as "set for the defence of the Gospel." Let them unite, and be valiant for the truth. I consider the distance that is so assiduously promoted between different parties of Christians; especially between the pious people *within*, and those *without* the pale of the religious establishment of this nation; as a master-device of Satan, at the present juncture. Who could have supposed, that in exact proportion as infidelity prevails, one class of serious Christians should become more and more averse, to join in any good work
with

with the rest of their brethren?—The fact, however, is notorious, both to the friends, and the foes of the Gospel; but they behold it with very different feelings. The evil has increased, awfully, within five years past: it is increasing to this day: would to God that it may be diminished, before it is yet too late!

Another circumstance, which, at the present juncture, renders Union needful to our preservation, is the unequalled *commotions* which agitate the nations, and threaten the governments of the earth. The progress of these has been astonishing; the end of them is uncertain; but their immediate effects must be severely felt. The clashing interests of worldly people, unavoidably involve them in reciprocal enmity and outrage. One party can only be established upon the ruins of another. But it neither needs, nor ought to be so with the people of God. “Our citizenship is in Heaven; from whence we are looking for the Saviour.” Our help cometh from the Lord; and in him, not in an arm of flesh, is our hope. If, indeed, any class of religious people resolve to cast in their lot with one, or another political party; with *that* they must stand or fall; or rather they must abide the certain danger of being buried in its ruins, if it is cast down; without any certainty of gaining by its patronage, if it succeeds. How much better is it to say to the people of Christ, in general, “We will go with you; for we have heard that God is with you!” So the Church at Jerusalem escaped the horrors attending the destruction of that city, by remembering, and obeying the directions of their Lord. By making the word of God, not the maxims of men, the rule of our conduct, *we* may likewise avoid, in part, the calamities attending political convulsions. But if the Judge of the whole

F 2

earth

earth fees fitting, that they should begin with the house of God ; what line of conduct would tend so much to the support of them who fear the Lord, amidst overwhelming distresses, as for them to “ speak often one to another ? ” If we now cultivate a mutual acquaintance, intercourse and correspondence, among all who love Christ in sincerity ; how good and pleasant might it be found in the worst of times ! This sentiment has already stood the test of experience. An annual conference is held at Herrnhut, the principal seat of the Moravian brethren in Germany, where a regular communication is maintained between pious Ministers of that denomination, and others of the Lutheran and Calvinist Churches, who reside in various and remote parts of the Continent. Many assemble there ; and others impart the Lord’s dealings with them, by epistolary correspondence. Some of them were situated in places that have been desolated by war ; but they were comforted, in all their tribulation, by the sympathy, advice, assistance, and prayers, of their distant brethren in the Faith. Let us, in the favourable circumstances, which are as yet vouchsafed to us, lay a similar foundation for mutual succour and consolation in times of need.

It seems necessary to advert to an apprehension, which I find has risen in the minds of others, although it never occurred to mine. It has been thought, that jealousy may be excited in civil governments, by advances toward religious Union among serious Christians. I trust this will *not* be the case. If it should be, it must be occasioned by a mistaken idea, either of our real design, or of the nature and tendency of the Gospel. Our plans, and our measures, will be open to universal notice ; and will sufficiently demonstrate that we aim at nothing else than to promote

promote pure and undefiled religion. And the general influence of this, in leading persons to live "quietly and peaceably, in all godliness and honesty," seems least questionable at the present crisis; when none can be ignorant of the outrages that have been committed, apparently, for want of religious principles. The experiment has been made, long since, by the exertions, and success, of the various classes of people commonly called Methodists; in whose steps, so far as they follow Christ, I trust we shall gladly tread. I doubt whether the spread of the Gospel, within the last half century, to which *they* have been greatly instrumental, has not had more effect than human laws or arms, to prevent the same desolations *here*, that have laid waste several parts of Europe. I acknowledge, that my own hope of being still preserved from these calamities, is chiefly founded upon the prayers, and the labours of Christians, for the spread of the Gospel among us. But, whatever event awaits, it is best for us to be doing the Lord's work, whilst it is in our power: and if we "suffer according to the will of God, let us commit our souls to him in well-doing as to a faithful Creator."

These observations lead to the last instance, in which I propose to shew that it is desirable for all real Christians to unite together; that is to *spread the knowledge of the Gospel* as extensively as possible. Personal benefit, mutual usefulness, and general defence, are not the sole objects that should interest believers to unite together. Though, like slender twigs, they can only be kept unbroken, by being bound together; yet, when united, they are capable of more than mere self-preservation. Adhering to our glorious "Head, from whom all the body has nourishment ministered, being knit together

“ by joints and bands, we shall increase with
 “ the increase of God.” Members of Christ
 are formed for activity; and, so far as they are
 animated by his spirit, will exert themselves to
 advance his cause, and to destroy the works of
 the Devil. It has been often said, that Satan
 dreads offensive war.

It is not easy to be conceived, how they, who
 have experienced the blessings communicated by
 the Gospel, can rest satisfied without endeavour-
 ing to impart them to others. The smallest
 degree of benevolence, might, one would think,
 prompt persons to invite others to share, in a
 kind of happiness, that would not be diminished
 by participation. Not merely the first disciple
 whom Jesus called, but even the Samaritan
 woman, diligently made known the Messiah,
 when they had discovered him. The benefit to
 be imparted, is surely of sufficient magnitude, to
 call for some exertions to diffuse it. It has
 been with astonishment, that I have known some
 professors of the Gospel ask, why we should go
 into neighbouring places to preach the Gospel,
 when the people might come a few miles to
 hear, if they would?—Why! because we know
 the value of the Gospel, and they do not: be-
 cause we are convinced of the danger of their
 immortal souls; of which they are ignorant,
 and likely to be so, except we apprise them of
 it: because they know not that Christ is preci-
 ous; and we, through his distinguishing mercy,
 and the kind exertions of fellow-creatures, have
 experienced that he is so. We would imitate
 our dear Lord; who came to seek and save that
 which was lost; and who paints his own con-
 duct, by the Shepherd following a wandering
 sheep into the wilderness, and bringing it home
 with joy upon his shoulder.—But it is said, the
heathen are the first object. They are the most
 necessitous.

necessitous. Do what you can for them. There is much, which you cannot do to heathens, that you may to your neighbours. The duties of instructing ignorant Pagans, and of awakening thoughtless and formal Christians, are so congenial one to another, that neither can be performed, from proper motives, and in a right manner, where the other is neglected. Are you capable of going to preach the Gospel to distant Heathen? Go, in the name of Christ! Confer not with flesh and blood! Look not behind you! There are thousands left to preach to British sinners. But you have infirmities, or other impediments, that deter you from leaving this country. Then be not idle, whilst at home. Hundreds may be useful to their neighbours, for *one* whose usefulness can extend to the Heathen. If you have not talents, or strength, for instructing either class of fellow-creatures, be the more earnest, in assisting and enabling others to labour among them. Where Ministers are aged, and incapable of their former activity, in visiting adjacent places; let their congregations become useful by aiding the exertions of others, whose youth and strength are devoted to the service of Christ. Is it said, that for this, and other objects to be promoted by this Union, there are already institutions in existence? Blessed be God, that there are! They have done much good; and much more I trust they will do. But look around your places of abode; and ask your own consciences, if there is not room, and necessity, for more general exertions? The Gospel is preached in this county, as commonly as in most parts of England. This place has long resounded with the joyful tidings of salvation. That admirable man John Bunyan; and other zealous and useful men, who preceded, and followed him, in labouring steadily here, are well known

to have spared no pains, and to have shunned no danger, in order to spread the Gospel round the neighbourhood. Several of the congregations, whose Ministers and Members I am now addressing, were, I believe, the fruits of their labours. Since that time, with how much zeal and liberality did good Mr. Berridge strive, by his own and others labours, to bring sinners to the knowledge of his Master! May a spirit, equally worthy of the Gospel, actuate the numerous body of the Clergy, who hold the same doctrines that he so powerfully preached! He preferred the salvation of souls to all other concerns, and "esteemed the reproach of Christ "greater riches than the treasures of Egypt." These honorable servants of Jesus have entered into their rest; "they have ceased from their "labours, and their works have followed them." Shall we not emulate their pattern? Had we done so in general, and without remitting our efforts, there would not, surely, at this day, be so many dark parts of the country. These are fewer in some quarters than in others; but the most diligent enquiry I could make has left me in doubt, whether an awakening ministry of the Gospel has yet extended, even occasionally, to one in three of the villages, and principal hamlets, in this county. Brethren, let us, like one of old, reckon nothing done, whilst so much remains to be done. Let us remember our Lord's command to "preach the Gospel to every "creature." Let us watch, and search, and pray, for means of access wherever the habitations of our neighbours are destitute of Gospel light and life. Let us consult, and plan, and execute, for the Lord, who hath called us from darkness, that we should shew forth his praise.

But the need of *uniting* for this purpose, has been questioned. The Union of Christ's people

has been already shewn to be natural and proper in itself, and to be needful for their mutual welfare: but that it is also necessary for the spread of the Gospel at home and abroad, is likewise deducible from experience and reason. When had the word of God the freest course? When was it most glorified, in the conversion of Jews and Pagans?—In the early ages of Christianity; when the Church retained its proper unity. Had it gone on to conquer, as at first, the earth would, long ere now, have been covered with the knowledge of Christ, as the sea is filled with water. Satan fell from Heaven, like lightning. He trembled for the strong holds he yet possessed, which were ready to be assailed with weapons, not carnal, but mighty through God. He had recourse to treachery; and by sowing discord among Christians, he secured the heathen, for a time, as his own possession. Since the reformation from Popery, whence is it, that *Protestants* have done so little toward enlightening the Heathen? Because they are disunited. The children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light. When the *Romish* Church beheld itself divested of so much power in Europe, it endeavoured to repair the damage by distant acquisitions. The unity it had maintained, such as it was, afforded ready and ample means for the undertaking. Vast funds were easily and expeditiously raised: sumptuous, and well-concerted establishments were formed; and hosts of Missionaries, of eminent talents, inundated Asia, Africa, and America. Long did the Papists boast that theirs was the only Apostolic Church, because *they* only laboured for the conversion of the Heathen. It was, indeed, a kind of conversion, which, though it extended rapidly, availed but little, as to the religion, or morality of its subjects. But how

how glorious might have been the fruits of these powerful exertions, had their object been to diffuse the Gospel in its purity! Several sects of Protestants, at length, were roused to emulation. Some real good was done by them; but their efforts were contracted and feeble, because they were unconnected with, and unsupported by each other. *One*, only, amongst Protestant Churches, has effectually done away the reproach that was incurred. It is hardly necessary for me to mention the Unity of Brethren, commonly known by the title of Moravians; a name, which though long despised, has, since the attention of Christians was revived toward the Heathen, been justly praised in all the Churches. Are *we* Ministers of Christ? They are "more. " In labours more abundant, in sufferings beyond measure, in prisons very frequent, in "deaths oft." All that Paul writes of his perils and his pains, might, without exaggeration, be applied to them. Their successes, also, though not commensurate with their efforts or their hardships, have been extensive and important. How are we to account for the distance, at which they have left all other Churches behind, in the Missionary course? Have they been more numerous, more learned, more opulent, than other denominations of Protestants? No: but they were more UNITED. They have vindicated the title they assumed: the *Unity of Brethren*. Though dispersed, partly by persecution, partly by Missionary labour, in every quarter of the globe; they are still *one* body, animated by one spirit; adhering to Jesus as their living head, and to each other as his members. But for this, what they have attempted would have been impracticable; what they have accomplished, would be incredible. In *this* respect, I would that all who hear me this day,
and

and all who in every place call upon the Lord Jesus, were almost, nay altogether, such as they are.

In every instance we have seen success, in spreading christianity, inseparable from the union of them who attempted it. With respect to the awakening of nominal Christians in this country, similar arguments might be brought from the arduous and successful labours of the *Methodists*; whether Calvinists, or Arminians. The rapid progress, and amazing numbers of the latter, in most parts of these kingdoms, must, I apprehend, be attributed, in a great measure, to that unity, of which the late Mr. Wesley was the centre, and the moving spring. It appears to me, that nothing was farther from the original design of that eminent servant of Christ, than the formation of a new sect. He seems to have aimed at promoting godliness in all parties, without separating them from their former religious connections. The obvious difficulty of keeping such a plan inviolate, when it became necessary to form distinct societies, and to erect separate places of worship, may apologize for deviations from that principle, in the conduct of some who were connected with him, and in his own toward the close of his life. To such difficulties, I apprehend, that a plan for spreading the Gospel by means of a general union of Christians, is not liable. Religious societies can only be formed, and places set apart for worship, where there are not already means of spiritual profit; and in the case of any congregation being newly raised, it will depend solely upon the sentiments of the awakened people, whether they are classed under one, or another, of the common denominations of Christians. We propose to unite only with them whom we believe to be truly pious; from *them* we would on

no

no account whatever separate ; and amongst them we would promote, not division, but harmony and zeal. Our Union cannot depend upon any individual, or particular body of people amongst us ; it can only exist by the Union of its members to Christ, and to each other for his sake, and under his sole authority. There must be persons chosen from amongst you, to act as officers for the whole body, in order to direct your united concerns. Experience will best determine, what degree, and what duration of authority, are necessary to be committed to such officers. The appointments will, in every respect, result from your own choice. Neither any individual, nor any class, pretends to superiority over another. It is *as brethren*, under one master, even Christ, that we unite ; and as such we are upon a footing of perfect equality : whether ministers or members of churches, whether elder or younger, learned or unlearned, rich or poor, male or female ; “ ye are all one in Christ Jesus.” If Christians, of all parties, will unite to spread the Gospel around them, making it a common cause ; and only be as diligent in the work as some have been, upon plans that were less comprehensive ; the effects may be beyond all calculation. I have referred to the work carried on under the late Mr. Wesley ; partly, to give due honour to his arduous labours ; partly, to shew how inconsistent it would be, for them who follow his steps, to keep aloof from other Christians ; and partly to demonstrate, from the success of his undertaking, what extensive effects we may hope to see produced, by uniting to spread the Gospel. I cannot express this argument in stronger terms, than those which have been addressed to me on the subject, by a friend, who was long in the connection referred to. “ If,” says he, “ in sixty years, John Wesley
“ and

“ and his brother, have raised four hundred
 “ travelling preachers, four thousand local ones,
 “ and a hundred thousand members in Great
 “ Britain, to say nothing of America; who,
 “ with constant hearers, form a body of four or
 “ five hundred thousand; and that, chiefly, by
 “ village, and itinerant preaching; what suc-
 “ cess may not a body of five or six hundred
 “ ministers expect, in the same time?” The
 number of pious ministers in Britain, who may,
 if they please, unite for this purpose, is incom-
 parably greater than my friend has stated it.
 The aid, to be derived from the labours of many
 private christians, in their congregations, may
 prove an accession of the greatest importance.
 If our Union were general, and our exertions
 but equal to those of a class of people whom
 man has much despised, but whom God has
 much honoured; I see no limits that could be
 set to our usefulness, but those of the habitable
 globe.

Perhaps, by this time, it will be granted to
 me, that the union among Christians is likely to
 be useful in spreading the knowledge of the Gos-
 pel. What is fully demonstrated by experience,
 we must regard as a fact, whether, or not, we
 can explain the mode of its operation. But it
 is not difficult to understand, how union tends
 to success, in accomplishing spiritual, any more
 than natural purposes. No one doubts, that an
 army can do more than a single warrior; or that
 ten persons, together, may move a weight, upon
 which all of them, separately, could produce
 no effect. When individuals fight, with, or
 without weapons, it is not uncommon for the
 smaller, and weaker of the two, to conquer;
 and he will be almost certain to do so, if he
 knows, better than his adversary, how to throw
 the whole force of his body into his arm. We
 propose,

propose, by uniting, to collect our powers, and direct them to the same object: and who will question that there is greater bodily strength for labour, in *several* preachers, than in one alone? As little is it to be doubted, that "in a multitude of counsellors there is wisdom," more than in any one man.

It has been suggested, that some ministers and congregations do, already, their utmost, to spread the gospel around them. Blessed be God for it! How desirable is it, that we all should, by mutual communications, be excited to the imitation of such examples; and that where zeal is exerted to the utmost present ability, it should, by seasonable assistance from other quarters, have a still greater scope afforded for its exercise! Can we hear of the great good the Lord is accomplishing by means of others, without longing to take our part in the work? I am fully persuaded, that churches, and professors, who have long been settling upon the lees, could not remain in so unprofitable a state, if they were well acquainted with what some of their brethren are doing for the Lord, and experiencing from his favour. What is more animating or edifying, than to read the lives, labours, and successes of eminent servants of God, who "through faith and patience have entered upon the promised inheritance;" except it be to behold living instances of the same zeal and usefulness? By the *disunion* of Christians, they know little, or nothing, of the work of God in the church. "Measuring themselves only by themselves, and comparing themselves only amongst themselves," they are not likely to be either humble, zealous, or "wise." Mutual acquaintance, counsel, and co-operation, will give a general circulation to christian zeal, like that of the blood through the limbs,

limbs, by which they become active. There is an emulation, natural to the human mind ; which, under a proper influence, is capable of being turned to the best of purposes. Many a boy, who has afterward become an eminent scholar, discovered no inclination for learning, till he was roused to emulation. Its effects upon the spread of the gospel is such, that some in the apostles time, and numbers since, have " preached Christ of contention." Paul rejoiced that, by any means, Christ was preached ; even though with a design to add affliction to his imprisonment. *We* should cultivate this temper, when we see persons evidently prompted to exertion, by motives of party spirit : but by Christian Union, we shall " provoke one another to " love," as well as " to good works."

Even the obstacles, that impede the spread of the gospel, will be partly done away by our uniting for the purpose. Beside those, which might otherwise arise from mutual opposition, or jealousy, on the one hand ; and delicacy of interference on the other ; there are objections from people ignorant of the gospel, which union alone can silence. Jews, and other infidels, have replied to the exhortations of Christian ministers ; " Why do you not agree among yourselves, before you pretend to convert us ? " Which party of Christians are we to join ? If " we adopt *your* sentiments, we shall be disclaimed by other Christians." Thus the name of Christ is blasphemed among unbelievers, on account of our divisions. But with how much advantage may we address them, not as advocates of a sect, but as serious believers in Christ ; laying aside our differences, and uniting our exertions, to bring sinners to his knowledge ! So, when we unitedly exhort nominal Christians to repentance, it will be evident, that our
aim

aim is not to draw them from *their* party to *ours*, but from the world, and satan, to Christ.

Thus, my brethren, I have feebly endeavoured to represent to you a few of the advantages, which may be enjoyed by uniting together as Christians; whether with respect to your personal edification, your mutual usefulness, your general preservation, or your success in spreading the gospel. If the Lord disposes, and enables you, to make the full proof of a Christian Union; I am confident, that you will find, not the half has been told you, of the benefits arising from it. It is "no new commandment," but that which was given, and practised "at the beginning." If it appears new to us, surely it must be, "because the darkness is passing away, and the true light shines upon us." We are *brethren*, in our endearing relations to God, and in our spiritual resemblance of each other. The dying love, the prayers, and the precepts of our Lord, constrain us to *dwell together in unity*; as Christians did, in the first, and best period of the church. It will be essentially conducive to our *comfort* and our *usefulness*. Let us not pride ourselves, therefore, in distinctions which shall soon be removed; but think it our honour to constitute an union, that *shall never be dissolved*. The prophecies, the languages, the knowledge of the earliest Christians, have long since vanished. "Faith, hope, and love, shall abide," through all ages of the church; but the greatest of these is LOVE, which, like GOD, whose name and nature it is, shall fill ETERNITY!

HYMN.

I.

How good, and pleasant, is the sight,
When *brethren* cordially unite !
Parted no more, by form, or name,
But *one* in CHRIST, their hope, their aim.

II.

When Israel's tribes together dwelt,
They the delights of union felt;
But CHRIST to sweeter union draws
The souls, devoted to his cause.

III.

Thus the first servants of our LORD,
Together dwelt with one accord;
And when their bounds extended wide,
No distance could their *hearts* divide.

IV.

Alas, that *self*, and *satan* gain'd
The vict'ry, where our LORD had reign'd!
And they, whom heav'nly bonds unite,
On earth, each other shun, or flight.

V.

Too long the Church has mourn'd, and bled;
Too far, her lifeless limbs been spread:
Spirit of CHRIST, thine influence give!
Let these dry bones *unite*, and *live*!

VI.

Join'd to our glorious HEAD above,
Let ev'ry *member* share our love;
And let each fellow *sinner* feel
The force of our reviving zeal!

VII.

The *gospel*, then, no empty sound,
Nor cunning fable, shall be found;
But *mercy*, *grace*, and *peace*, obtain
Their endless, universal reign.



POSTSCRIPT.

THE haste, with which it was necessary that the preceding discourse should pass through the press, after delays which had unavoidably occurred, prevented the author from ever seeing the whole of it together, till it had been printed; and has occasioned some errors, and repetitions, which would otherwise have been corrected. Toward these, and such other defects as may be accounted for by the author's distance from the press, he has to request the reader's exertion of candour. A considerable time having, nevertheless, elapsed, since the Union of Christians was formed at Bedford, some account of its present state will, probably, be thought desirable.

The number of *Ministers*, who have united together, is above thirty; and the pious people of their congregations appear generally disposed to join in the Union. It now comprehends six religious denominations. Meetings have been held in each of the several districts before specified; and have begun to be repeated, at intervals of a month, or six weeks. Several towns, not at first proposed, are now included within the limits. Places of worship have been newly opened in various situations; and in others, to which the Gospel had before gained access, it has been more frequently preached. The diligence and fervour of Ministers have increased; and the people mostly crowd to hear, and attend with remarkable seriousness. On the minds of some, very powerful religious impressions have been made. Opposition, as might be expected, has begun to manifest itself; but hitherto without effect. Christian Brethren! pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified!

Newport Pagnel,
December 28, 1797.

